

Reading Partners Uses Act-On to Strengthen National Brand and Empower Regional Offices

Like most national nonprofits, Reading Partners faced the unique challenge of having to steward their national brand while helping local chapters meet their individual communication needs. To do this efficiently, they needed a marketing automation platform that integrated with Salesforce and enabled both global oversight and regional independence. With Act-On, Reading Partners has been able to streamline workflows, enable a rich and consistent brand experience, and more effectively engage donors and volunteers – all using less time and resources.



The Act-On team is attentive and willing to work through any challenge you encounter, and their software is effective and cost-efficient for non-profits like ours.



SARAH DELANEY-BUSCH
Volunteer Recruiter
Reading Partners

Challenge

Reading Partners works with schools around the country to help struggling students read at grade level by providing volunteers to tutor them. Their research-based program fills a great need and is wildly successful. Nationally, only 20% of low-income students are reading proficiently by the fourth grade, but nearly 90% of K-2 students who work with Reading Partners master the foundational skills needed to read at grade level.

Reading Partners marketing and communications manager Sarah Delaney-Busch actively supports this mission by recruiting volunteers through the organization's website, overseeing internal and regional communications efforts, and driving several national campaigns each year. But with 14 local chapters, each with its own series of news and events, the process was daunting. And ensuring the quality of the work and integrity of the brand was even harder.

"Before Act-On, all Reading Partners' mass emails, newsletters, and campaigns were produced at the national level, which gave me control over the organization's messaging and design, but the process was highly impractical," Sarah said. "Regional teams would submit communications requests and draft language, and I would produce the finished product and manage all corresponding workflows. This process made production labor intensive and time consuming."

Complicating the process was the fact that Reading Partners' audience is broad and includes donors, volunteer tutors, internal staff, and other community partners. To effectively engage each of these groups, Sarah needed a marketing automation platform that allowed her to streamline collaboration with regional offices and maintain sufficient oversight. And it had to integrate with Salesforce – the CRM that united all the chapters.

"I needed a system that offered parent and child accounts, and gave us creative control over design elements, templates, and messaging," she said. "The local chapters needed to have greater autonomy, while maintaining brand standards. The platform also had to be easy to use and provide accessible performance metrics, in order to easily evaluate and refine our efforts."



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Solution

After a thorough vendor search, Reading Partners selected Act-On because the platform can be configured in a parent/child model. This allows Sarah to give local chapters their own instance of Act-On, with workflow and approval settings to ensure she can review communications before they're sent. She creates and distributes templates that express the look and feel of the organization, and regional offices populate them with relevant content or leverage them for specific uses, such as event invitations and newsletters. The system allows her to check the accuracy of everything, from spelling and grammar to graphic brand identity and positioning.

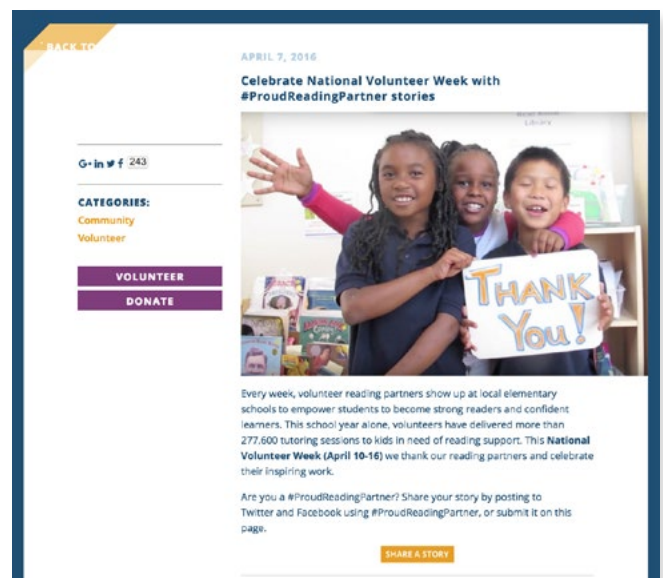
"Our various regional offices receive a tremendous amount of support from their communities, but they rely on the national organization for many of their broader marketing and communications needs," said Sarah. "Act-On gives them the tools they need to reach their individual networks while upholding national standards and producing high quality messages and campaigns. It has improved our entire communications operation."

This delivery model, coupled with Act-On's rich capabilities, has helped Reading Partners effectively implement programs that engage every segment of their audience throughout their entire journey with the organization.

Internally, Sarah is using Act-On to build a strong brand through a series of emails, starting with a weekly "roadmap" to all staff that keeps the organization running smoothly and highlights everything from action items to featured volunteers. Staff also receive a monthly newsletter from the CEO that underscores Reading Partners' mission and vision. And Sarah sends a quarterly newsletter on behalf of the national leadership and development team to all the regional leaders to unify and direct their work.

Sarah and the Reading Partners community engagement team also use Act-On and Salesforce to recruit and retain volunteer tutors. Prospective tutors complete an Act-On web form that's tied to Reading Partner's parent account.

The information is pushed into Salesforce, and then regional offices segment their lists and follow up with their leads directly. And they nurture both prospective and current tutors by sending them news about the organization and volunteer appreciation events.



Reading Partners invited volunteer tutors to share their experience through an Act-On web form on their blog.

Solution (continued)

One campaign that integrated Reading Partners' newsletters and website was particularly popular. "During National Volunteer Week, we sent out a volunteer appreciation video and encouraged tutors to visit our blog and submit their own stories," Sarah said. "Our audience responded enthusiastically. We received more stories than we had room for on the blog, so we posted some on our regional stories page. It was a very effective campaign that used a lot of different Act-On features."

Getting Insight on Donor Behavior

Sarah works closely with the development team to engage Reading Partners' donors just as thoughtfully. She drives several national fundraising campaigns each year, and Act-On helps her coordinate these initiatives with those driven by the regional offices to ensure consistent messaging and avoid scheduling conflicts.

And she's using Act-On to segment her donor pool and gather behavioral insight. For example, she recently discovered that during the spring appeal, tutors had higher open and click-through rates, and contributed more than her list of donor prospects.

"It affirmed that tutors are a great individual giving pool, and suggests we could be reaching out to them more often to deepen their engagement with Reading Partners, whether it's through donating more or giving time in other ways besides tutoring," Sarah said. "This kind of insight is really helpful as we continue to target our messages and refine how we grow our organization."



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Results

Adopting Act-On has allowed Reading Partners to strengthen its brand and increase efficiency throughout the entire organization. "The system allows me to nurture and protect Reading Partners' national identity, while empowering individual chapters to market effectively to their communities," Sarah said. "Creating and replicating templates is easy, which saves me time and gives our regional offices the autonomy to develop their own outreach programs to volunteers and donors. Act-On's parent-child account structure is exactly what we needed."

Act-On has also fueled Reading Partners' ability to segment its audience and target its communications. "Our regional offices can easily manage their lists in Act-On, and I can develop precise messages for any subgroup, whether they're more nuanced appeals to donors at various levels, or programs that help volunteers transition into and out of their roles," Sarah said. "Act-On has just made us a smarter operation across the board."

Looking ahead, Sarah is excited about Reading Partners' partnership with Act-On and the potential for growth it offers. "The system is robust and adaptable, and I'm hoping to begin using features like A/B testing and RSS email feeds," she said. "Act-On has become a true ally in our efforts to mobilize support for our cause. The Act-On team is attentive and willing to work through any challenge you encounter, and their software is effective and cost-efficient for non-profits like ours."



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About Act-On Software

Act-On Software is a marketing automation company delivering innovation that empowers marketers to do the best work of their careers. Act-On is the only integrated workspace to address the needs of the customer experience, from brand awareness and demand generation, to retention and loyalty. With Act-On, marketers can drive better business outcomes and see higher customer lifetime value. The Act-On platform provides marketers with power they can actually use, without the need for a dedicated IT resource.

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