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Editor's Note

With the new year in full swing, now is the perfect time to focus on [maintaining the integrity of your data](#). In this issue, we will discuss why it is important to have policies and procedures in place to ensure that data is being entered into your fundraising system in a consistent way.

And because data integrity shouldn't stop there, we will also discuss ways you can improve the accuracy and validity of the data already in your database. Finally, learn from the mistakes of others by reading some [horrifyingly true backup stories](#).



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Save the date for Blackbaud's Conference on Philanthropy.

This year, we're offering two great conference opportunities — one in Charleston, and one in Vancouver. Choose your destination today and mark your calendar to attend.

Blackbaud's Canadian Conference on Philanthropy

When: 11-13 June 2006

Where: Vancouver, British Columbia

Registration opens in February.

Blackbaud's Conference on Philanthropy

When: October 22-25, 2006

Where: Charleston, South Carolina

Registration opens in May.

Stay tuned to <http://events.blackbaud.com> for updated information.

Save Time. Save Money. Save Face.

The Importance of Data Integrity

To kick off 2006 and its annual campaign, a nonprofit sent out a mailing to all of its recent donors. Staff had begun planning at the end of 2005 and were able to get the mailing out before the recent postage increase. The development team was excited to see the results of their hard work and strategic planning.

Shortly after the mailing went out, they received a phone call from an upset widow who had just received a letter addressed to her deceased husband. They also received several calls from donors who had received the mailing twice or even three times. And the majority of the mailings were returned by the post office because they had invalid addresses!



Embarrassment, waste, and frustration weren't exactly the results they were looking for. Even though they had begun planning early, they hadn't taken the first critical step of analyzing the health of their data. If they had, they would have found records that should have been marked as

deceased, duplicate constituent records, and invalid addresses.

By maintaining the integrity of your data, you can save face, money, and time.

Data Integrity

Data integrity is more than accuracy and validity; it is peace of mind knowing that your data can be trusted. Policies and procedures should be in place at your organization that ensure data is put into your fundraising system in a consistent way. But data integrity doesn't stop at data entry. Even if you do have policies and procedures in place to help reduce errors, it is likely that there are still some records that contain invalid information. In order to achieve the highest possible level of data integrity, you must be committed to ongoing analysis and maintenance.

What better time than the start of a new year to analyze the health of your data and see which areas could use improvement? Plus, with the recent increase in postage prices, it is more important than ever to ensure that you are sending out quality mailings!

Clean Up Duplicate Records

So where should you start? It's a good idea to start with cleaning up any duplicate constituent records. By eliminating those records, you'll surely save time later, as you won't have to clean up the same record twice. But be careful when cleaning up duplicates, as some of the constituent's data may be located on one record but not the other. You don't want to lose any data. Eliminating duplicates will prevent you from mailing to the same person more than once, which will save you money.

Update Deceased Records

Next, identify deceased records and mark them appropriately. You certainly don't want to send any communications to a deceased person's family, so be sure to flag the record so that they are eliminated from your mailings. There are a few other things you should take into consideration. Perhaps the widow or widower should now have soft credits for past gifts given by the deceased, and perhaps the widow or widower's addressee should be updated. Maintaining accurate deceased records allows you to treat the whole family with dignity and respect.

Locate Valid Addresses

Finally, make sure the addresses in your system are valid. Donors may have moved. The United States Postal Office maintains a National Change of Address database that locates valid addresses. A service such as this allows you to keep up with constituents when they move, saving you money on mailings and allowing you to foster better relationships with them through consistent communications.

By using these key points as a guideline, you can begin the process of maintaining healthy data. The payoff will be saving time and money, but more importantly you will be able to communicate with your constituents in a way that pleases them, helping to ensure lifelong relationships with each of them.

Backup Horror Stories

These tales are horrifyingly true. Unfortunately, something similar could happen to you if you aren't regularly backing up your fundraising system, testing the copies, and storing them in a safe, off-site location!

Invalid Backup Procedure



An organization found that its current backups were unusable. Staff finally restored a two-month old backup, so they had to reenter all gifts and other data for that two-month period. It was a nasty reminder to test backups and keep more than a week's worth of backup tapes.




An organization's backup software reported a successful backup every night. However, it was backing up to an empty folder. Eighteen months earlier, staff had moved their database to a new server without making changes in the backup software. They finally discovered the problem when their live database experienced data corruption.

Theft or Natural Disaster

An organization's administration building was destroyed in a fire — including the backups that were stored in a fireproof safe in the same building. The fireproof safe kept the tape from burning — but unfortunately it didn't save it from melting.

An organization's data and server were water-damaged during a flood. When staff attempted a backup, they discovered that the network administrator wasn't making and testing backups. The organization restored a 14-month-old backup and the employee was let go.

Latest and Greatest

 web seminars	 in the news	 resources
<p>Raise More and Cut Costs Come learn why The Raiser's Edge® is the only fundraising solution you'll ever need.</p> <p>February 2nd, 1:00 p.m. ET February 16th, 3:00 p.m. ET</p> <hr/> <p>Online Fundraising and Communication Find out how NetSolutions is the fastest way for your organization to accept donations, manage events, communicate with constituents and manage memberships online.</p> <p>February 21st, 2:00 p.m. ET</p>	<p>Text-Messaging Connects With Donors Read the the Nonprofit Times article and learn how other charities thumbed their way to fresh dollars.</p> <hr/> <p>Read the Business 2.0 article: Helping Nonprofits Find the Hidden Gold Discover how nonprofits are using Blackbaud Analytics™ to find the hidden gold in every database.</p>	<p>Online Gift Donor Profile Online giving in the U.S. has reached approximately \$2.6 billion. Read this Blackbaud Analytics study that analyzes these online gift donors and their giving trends in 2005. Read the study here (PDF 695K)</p> <hr/> <p>2006 Matching Gift Survey Data Summary This report summarizes the responses of 1,111 matching gift companies and their 20,000+ subsidiaries to Blackbaud's annual matching gift survey. Download the survey results (PDF 695K)</p>

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