

## A Spotlight on Save the Children and Merkle RMG: Empowering Growth Through Technology and Service Partnership

### About the Client

Save the Children invests in childhood – every day, in times of crisis and for our future. In the United States and around the world, we are dedicated to ensuring every child has the best chance for success. Our pioneering programs give children a healthy start, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. Our advocacy efforts provide a voice for children who cannot speak for themselves. As the leading expert on children, we inspire and achieve lasting impact for millions of the world's most vulnerable girls and boys. By transforming children's lives now, we change the course of their future and ours.



### Background/Situation

Prior to partnering with Merkle Response Management Group (RMG), Save the Children employed a bank's lockbox services to handle donations. However, as organizational goals and strategy evolved, the nonprofit's requirements began to exceed the bank's capabilities.

Save the Children's leadership had a number of direct mail fundraising ideas and best practices they wanted to implement to drive revenue and more effectively carry out the nonprofit's mission. One specific aim was to test packages with different reply coupons to assess the impact on response rates and average gift amounts. However, the bank's technology wasn't able to handle reply documents of various sizes and paper weights. Plus, anything that wasn't a standard "clean" response was rejected by the bank and sent back to Save the Children to handle, which further delayed processing and increased costs.

"We used to have a lot more mail items sent back to us because they simply were not able to be processed," said Elena Consalvo, senior director, Mass Market Fundraising for Save the Children.

Save the Children needed a provider with flexible technology that would allow the organization to exercise more creativity in its marketing and fundraising campaigns.

"We felt restricted and needed more options than the bank could offer," Consalvo said. "We knew that more flexibility would be essential to growing recurring business."

Also at that time, Save the Children's fulfillment and acknowledgement services were handled by a separate vendor, which meant the nonprofit's response management processes were fragmented and had to be managed across different organizations. Additionally, the nonprofit wanted to improve the timeliness of its acknowledgements.

"We've seen a lot of success in our mass market fundraising and our mid-level giving programs," she noted. "Even if we encounter list fatigue, we're able to offset it with the creative testing we've been able to implement because of our relationship with Merkle RMG."

**Elena Consalvo**  
Senior Director, Mass  
Market Fundraising for  
Save the Children

As a result, leadership sought a single service partner with the experience and proven ability to process donations and fulfillment quickly, accurately, securely and cost-effectively.

### The Merkle RMG Solution

Merkle RMG became a service partner to Save the Children in early 2015 and quickly established a more effective donation processing and fulfillment solution to support the nonprofit's direct mail fundraising program.

Merkle RMG's advanced technology provided the necessary flexibility for handling documents of differing sizes and weights. In turn, this allowed Save the Children more latitude in designing direct mail packages and reply forms.

"With that added functionality," Consalvo said, "we're able to do more creative testing in each campaign and make informed decisions more quickly."

Merkle RMG's technical flexibility, along with the ability to handle the exceptions that Save the Children didn't want to handle themselves, delivered the nonprofit a broader scope of capabilities. Merkle RMG's comprehensive solution brought more speed and efficiency to the processing of mail donations with fewer rejections for Save the Children to handle.

Merkle RMG also offered best practices advice to help Save the Children improve how the organization thanks donors who give in response to a disaster. After the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal, Save the Children saw a tremendous response from donors giving to support Save the Children's role in relief efforts. Merkle RMG's teams recommended best practices for crafting thank-you language for Save the Children's gift acknowledgements. Merkle RMG also ramped up the staffing on Save the Children's account to maintain timely processing and acknowledgment of donations throughout the surge in volume after the earthquake.

### Results

The on-boarding of Save the Children's processing with Merkle RMG was the first key step in laying the foundation for success. Consalvo said that implementing Merkle RMG's services was extremely smooth across the organization.

"In the nonprofit industry, sometimes it's tough getting started with a new vendor," she said. "But Merkle RMG was very organized and patient. It was a very easy process for us."

Since entering the partnership, Save the Children has seen gains not only in donor lifetime value, but also in efficiency and reliability of processes, which gives leadership the confidence to pursue new strategic goals.

In the last year, Consalvo said, Save the Children has seen a 25 percent increase in average gift amount despite an industry-wide downtrend in response rates. She credits this dramatic increase in part to Save the Children's ability to experiment with more effective direct mail marketing methods.

"We've seen a lot of success in our mass market fundraising and our mid-level giving programs," she noted. "Even if we encounter list fatigue, we're able to

"We felt restricted and needed more options than the bank could offer," Consalvo said. "We knew that more flexibility would be essential to growing recurring business."

**Elena Consalvo**  
Senior Director, Mass  
Market Fundraising for  
Save the Children



offset it with the creative testing we've been able to implement because of our relationship with Merkle RMG."

Consalvo also observed how Save the Children has been able to significantly expand the nonprofit's acquisition program, aided by a higher level of confidence in its ability to handle greater workloads. Since partnering with Merkle RMG, Save the Children has grown its program from two campaigns a year to six, increasing its total number of mailings from 1.6 million to nearly 3.3 million per year.

"Our volumes have doubled," said Consalvo. "That's a testament to everything going so smoothly. When you go from two to six mailings a year, it's a lot more work for everyone. But with Merkle RMG's support, our acquisition team had the confidence to expand our efforts with the staff we had in place."

Transparency and searchability are also valuable benefits, according to Consalvo. With Merkle RMG's web-based electronic archive tool, Save the Children can search for and view images of every document in the transactions Merkle RMG processes.

"The fact that we can see everything Merkle RMG is doing – that's really helpful," she said.

Consalvo also noted the efficiency, timeliness and accuracy of Merkle RMG's fulfillment and acknowledgement services.

"With Merkle RMG, those processes are definitely more timely," she said. "Merkle RMG is always on top of delivering their files by the specified time each day."

She added that with new levels of flexibility, Save the Children can incorporate more nuance into its gift acknowledgements and better tailor its acknowledgement strategy.

"We're constantly updating things," Consalvo said. "We've wanted to start acknowledging mid-level donors and high-level donors a little differently. Merkle RMG has allowed us to do that and has really streamlined the whole process for us."

### **A Relationship With a Past and a Future**

Consalvo says Save the Children may add a seventh mailing to their acquisition program in the next year, and plans to implement a monthly mailing pattern. She also says that Save the Children aims to further customize acknowledgements, including a new approach to addressing donors who give in response to an emergency. Now, she said, her team feels like they can explore these types of variations without being encumbered by logistics.

"We can spend more time on strategy, knowing that Merkle RMG has the ability to execute it," she said. "We now have the confidence to say 'yes, we can do this'."

As the relationship grows, Consalvo said, Save the Children will explore additional opportunities for leveraging Merkle RMG's services to advance its mission.



"In the nonprofit industry, sometimes it's tough getting started with a new vendor," she said. "But Merkle RMG was very organized and patient. It was a very easy process for us."

**Elena Consalvo**  
Senior Director, Mass  
Market Fundraising for  
Save the Children