Best Databases for River and Watershed Groups, 2011-2012

(from the LeadGreen[1] Survey of Databases for River and Watershed Groups. N=93.)

- *Baird Straughan, LeadGreen, May 2012*

Trends

- River and watershed organizations are shifting to online databases, though there are still some inexpensive PC-based alternatives which are highly rated by small groups.
- For the online databases, integration with email and web newsletter signup is now the norm, although few organizations are investing in fully integrated online donation systems. (And online revenue probably doesn't justify it yet.)
- Increasingly, groups are looking beyond traditional databases and toward the capabilities of a full-fledged "customer relationship management system" (CRMS), which can track workflow, standardize processes, and interact with email and the web.   They are moving their databases out of the fundraising closet and opening them up to their entire staffs and sometimes lead volunteers. As the number of users goes up, costs rise.
- For the online databases with e-mail integration and web signup, most organizations spend over $2,000 annually, and more for the first year's installation. They report that these databases are worth their higher cost.
- Satisfaction with the online databases correlates with the perceived quality of support. Some of the most powerful database systems rank lower, likely because they're designed for larger organizations and require more expensive support contracts, which smaller organizations choose not to buy.
- Among databases with three or more responses, the most recommended web products are still WaterGrass and e-Tapestry, which are designed for nonprofits and allow organizations to add modules as needed. (WaterGrass is designed specifically for river and watershed groups.)
- Among the products which run on a single computer or network, Giftworks (a fundraising package) and FileMaker (a configurable database program) get the highest recommendations.
- Among databases with one or two responses, there are some here-to-for unobserved species (like Wild Apricot, Total Community Builder, CiviCRM, and "Gifts, Friends and Time") with enthusiastic reviews.

Looking forward – Marketers and large institutions are increasingly relying on data-driven campaigns to cultivate donors, but so far few river and network organizations use databases as an information hub to systematically cultivate volunteers, donors and

---

[1] LeadGreen is a consulting firm working with river and watershed organizations. It is the creator of *WaterGrass*, one of the databases evaluated in this survey.

leaders. We believe that in the future successful organizations will embrace these techniques, called"engagement strategies," and manage them through their databases.

Rankings: Average Size of List vs. Average Recommendation
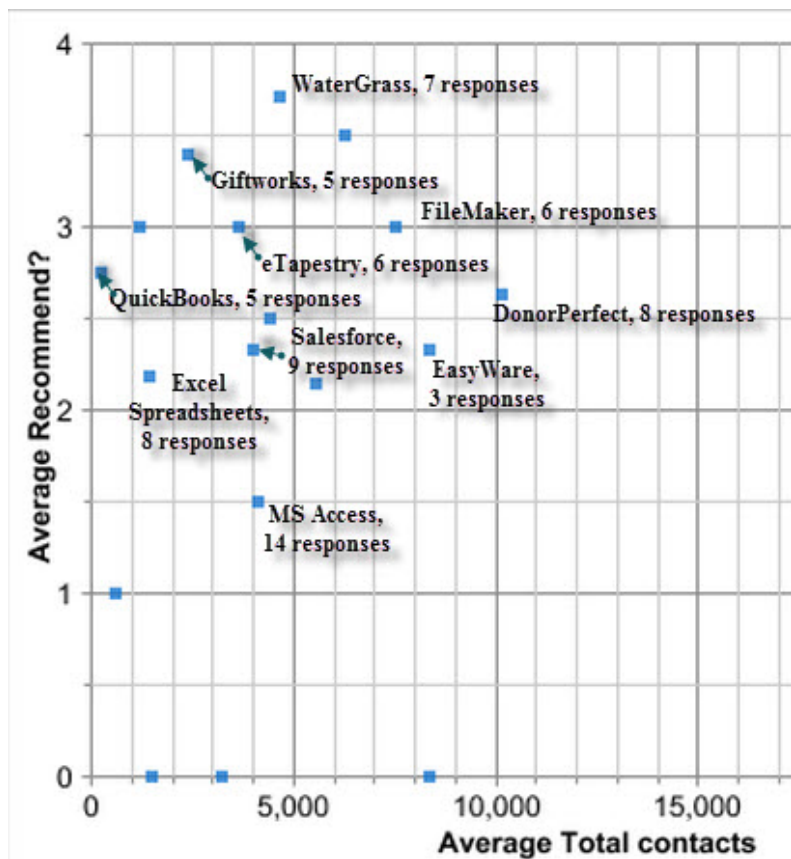
Notes to Chart:
(Only software with 3 or more responses is identified.)

WaterGrass, the most recommended, is also the database provided by LeadGreen, which does this survey. It's built on Salesforce.

Giftworks is a standalone or networked fundraising package that's long been highly ranked by smaller groups.

FileMaker is a flexible, network-capable database package that runs on Apple and Windows. You build your own application.

eTapestry offers low-cost web-based fundraising when groups are small. As the number of their contacts rise and they want new capabilities, eTapestry's costs rise. Some groups then transition to other products.

Quickbooks serves only when a group has few contacts.

Salesforce is the industry-leading customer relationship management system, free to nonprofits. It is *very* powerful and requires configuration. Groups that work with good consultants tend to be very happy, but there are also many which try to configure Salesforce on their own or choose inexperienced consultants …

EasyWare's low rankings reflect the frustrations of larger organizations which have used the software successfully and now run up against its limitations. In their comments, they say it was a good choice when they were smaller.

Microsoft Access can be a good starting point, but it requires real expertise to use it effectively.

For more information, email baird@leadgreen.org for the full report, or sign up for more information at www.leadgreen.org.