

Recurly Case Study

The logo for The Cook Political Report is centered within a magnifying glass. The magnifying glass has a grey handle and a blue circular lens. The text inside the lens reads "The Cook POLITICAL REPORT" with a star symbol below it.

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Cook
POLITICAL
REPORT
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The Cook Political Report Relies on
Recurly to Expand
Beyond the Beltway



Overview

The Cook Political Report is an independent, non-partisan weekly newsletter that analyzes elections and campaigns for the US House of Representatives, US Senate, State Governors, and President, as well as American political trends. Since its founding in 1984, The Cook Political Report has grown from a one-person operation to a full-time staff of six, and has transitioned from a print-only publication to an online platform that offers individual and group subscriptions, as well as site licenses.

The organization's subscribers are a mix of congressional organizations, large Political Action Committees (PACs), lobbyists, and individuals in the DC area and beyond. Subscribers rely on Cook Political for their independent analysis, to stay abreast of politics nationwide, and to inform their donation efforts.

“We’re political forecasters. We rate every House, Senate, and Governor's race between solid Republican and solid Democrat,” says Ally Flinn, Web Editor for The Cook Political Report, the organization’s weekly newsletter. Flinn oversees cookpolitical.com, is in charge of publishing and content management, and drafts and distributes the weekly newsletter.

The majority of Cook Political’s revenue comes from subscriptions, and optimizing this aspect of the business is a key part of Flinn’s job. She was the person responsible for choosing Recurly as the platform best-suited to manage their subscription business.



Benefits of Recurly

- Easy implementation got Cook Political up and running quickly
- New payment options and streamlined payment process improved subscriber acquisition
- Self-serve features improve subscriber experience and reduce support requests



Payment and Other Challenges

Before implementing Recurly, Cook Political offered only a yearly subscription plan which did not auto-renew. To keep receiving it, subscribers had to manually opt in again each year and either send in a check or pay with PayPal. It was an inefficient process, and the organization knew it was probably impacting subscriber acquisition and retention.

Eventually, the organization was able to make the transaction recurring for subscribers using PayPal. But this was not an ideal solution, and people were confused. Even though they could pay with a credit card through PayPal, many thought they needed an actual PayPal account, which they didn't.

Another challenge for Cook Political was that although they have only one newsletter, their subscribers are diverse, with a variety of purchase preferences. They have long-term subscribers who still pay by check once a year, which requires a manual payment process. They have "political junkies" who only want a few issues and want to pay by credit card or bank transfer (ACH). They have academic subscribers paying a different rate. And every month, some number of subscribers would pay by check, realize they could use a credit card, and want to go back and change their payment method.

Flinn was convinced that the easier the payment process, the more likely someone will pay. "I told my boss, 'It's too hard to pay, people get too confused. We need to make this easier and more intuitive.'" In addition to new payment options, Cook Political needed more flexibility, self-serve features, and automated processes. In short, they needed a more robust platform that was specifically designed to manage subscriptions.

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Ally Flinn

Web Editor, The Cook Political Report



A Proven Track Record

Since Cook Political has such a small team running the website and newsletter and so many subscribers, they also needed a solution that would be easy to implement and easy to use, with a proven track record. “Any way that we could make our lives easier and our subscribers happier, that’s what we needed.” They had brought in a web development company to assist in evaluating potential solutions and to conduct the implementation. They looked at one other platform, but after reviewing Recurly, the developers were unanimous. They told Flinn, “Recurly is the one we recommend. We prefer their API, and their documentation is better too. This is the platform that’s going to work better for you.”

Says Flinn, “It just seemed that considering how many different types of subscribers we had, and all the different use cases, Recurly was the best fit.” After implementing Recurly in June 2018, Flinn is happy to report that, “The results have been absolutely wonderful—they speak for themselves. Our monthly revenue has doubled, tripled, which is really fantastic!”

No Detail Left Untouched

Flinn describes the implementation process as “incredibly well organized. We had regular meetings to check in, and if my developers had questions, we were always able to contact the Recurly team.” Recurly assisted in importing the users from PayPal, along with other users who were paying by check, and academic users who were paying an educational rate. “No detail was left untouched, which was great. There are so many details with subscriptions, as I’ve learned, and it’s very easy to miss many of them,” notes Flinn.

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A key feature that allowed Cook Political to implement the Recurly platform and get up and running quickly was Recurly's **hosted payment pages** which are PCI compliant and require no developer support. The Cook Political staff knew that the 2018 elections in November were predicted to have huge voter turnout and be highly impactful—and they knew they couldn't risk missing out on this potential windfall of new subscribers by enduring a long, drawn-out implementation.

Astounding Results

While Cook Political certainly expected to increase their subscriber base due to the unusual interest in the November 2018 election, they did not expect subscriptions to their annual plan to double the first month and almost triple in four months. And monthly subscriptions (which were launched at the end of 2017) increased eight-fold from June 2018 to 800 in October.

“When your business is politics, you're always going to make more money on election years, which is why I would be a little more hesitant about this data if it wasn't so astounding,” says Flinn. “I compared these results to previous election years, and sign-ups certainly went up but not close to these results by any measure.”

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Dedicated Subscription Features

Cook Political also credits Recurly's **automated dunning feature** with helping to reduce churn and create efficiencies. In the past, they were very lenient with subscribers if their payment was late. Eventually, they'd have to reach out and try to track down the payment. "It made us feel like the bad guys," says Flinn. "Now, with Recurly our dunning is so seamless."

In addition to results from dunning, Cook Political appreciates how much money Recurly's **Account Updater** and **Revenue Optimization Engine** are able to recover for them. "With the money these features recoup for us every month, Recurly basically pays for itself!"

The ability for subscribers to self-serve has also been a boon. They were getting so many calls from subscribers who couldn't understand how to sign up, how to cancel, or how to change their payment method. "Now, it's just very easy and intuitive. People can change from the monthly to the yearly plan without our help anymore. From a time and effort standpoint, it's made a huge difference," notes Flinn.

The flexibility the Recurly platform provides has given Cook Political the ability to offer new subscription plans. For example, they now offer a monthly plan, and using Recurly's **Subscription Billing Terms** feature, they can offer subscribers on the annual plan the option to pay in monthly installments.

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Excited for the Future

Going forward, Flinn is looking forward to delving into additional Recurly features such as the **bulk unique coupon function**. She notes, “That’s something we could never do before, so we’re really excited. And we’re going to offer additional academic discounts too. Recurly makes everything so seamless. This was one of the reasons we liked Recurly—there are so many things we can do with it. And although there are a ton of future challenges we’re anticipating, I’m excited that we have the Recurly platform in place.”



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Recurly

Recurly provides enterprise-class subscription management for thousands of businesses worldwide.

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