

Keeping the wheels in motion

National Multiple Sclerosis Society and Salesforce kick fundraising into high gear



Call for change

Reimagining success

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is a non-profit organization that funds research, advocates for social and political change and sponsors services that support people living with multiple sclerosis (MS) as well as their families.

For 75 years the Society has focused on fulfilling its mission: mobilizing people and resources to drive research for a cure and address the challenges of everyone affected by MS.

The Society's flagship Bike MS event, the largest outdoor cycling fundraiser in the world, is integral to its mission. Nearly 75,000 cyclists comprising more than 6,000 teams ride together every year across 68 routes. The event brings together communities, families and businesses to make a difference in the fight against MS and has raised more money than any other cycling event for any other cause, totaling more than \$1.4 billion to date.

When the global pandemic occurred, however, the Society faced the prospect of having its biggest source of revenue canceled—at a time when the nearly one million people living with MS in the United States arguably needed the most support. The Society had previously worked with Accenture on a roadmap for the non-profit's future, including what technology capabilities it would need to get there. Looking for creative and innovative ways to use technology to save Bike MS, the Society turned to Accenture to help reimagine the event for a socially distanced world.



When tech meets human ingenuity

Transformation on the move

Together with Accenture, the Society completely rebuilt its successful, pre-pandemic operational plan.

Starting from scratch, it created strategies and tactics using new technologies that allowed for a successful event, even during a pandemic.

Rebranded as “Bike MS: Inside Out,” the Society and Accenture set out first to understand the most engaging moments of the in-person events, which included outreach to past participants. The focus was on developing an understanding of

their end-to-end experience and identifying the moments that matter most. Those key moments included training rides, the grand depart, rest stops, the afterparty and the awards ceremony.

Human centered insights were used to design new experiences that could not only recreate the impact of the original ride, but also enhance it. With these changes in place, the Bike MS: Inside Out event enabled solo fundraisers to participate outdoors as well as indoors on stationary bikes using a cycling app.

The Society had already chosen to use Salesforce to support its fundraising initiatives. However, Accenture proposed a new multiplatform solution, supported by and integrated with Salesforce Marketing Cloud and Sales Cloud, to replicate and enhance the ride experience. By applying a novel composable approach for efficiently enabling seamless interoperability across its applications, the Society could tap into new audiences and potential new donors.

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Partnering with Accenture to build an exceptional experience for our cyclists during the pandemic was one of the bright spots during such an uncertain time. I am so appreciative of their generosity and innovation in ensuring we kept our most passionate participants engaged while coming together in person was not possible.”

Jennifer Lee
EVP of Development
National MS Society



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For example, physical exercise tracking app Strava has a community of more than 50 million athletes. By integrating the Strava app with Salesforce as the digital core, the Society could introduce a tracked ride for Bike MS: Inside Out to outdoor riders, while also appealing to the existing Strava community. Further integration with Zwift, a massive multiplayer online cycling and training app, helped boost the virtual experience for indoor riders and tapped into the app's existing community of users.

The new Bike MS: Inside Out event was supported by the Society's peer-to-peer fundraising platform, a competitive ride tracked by Strava and Zwift, and an individual rider fundraising platform powered by Salesforce Marketing Cloud and Sales Cloud. Salesforce Marketing Cloud was used to help keep customer data synchronized across all event activities and to trigger messages at key moments to boost fundraising via a shared leaderboard, encourage riders, and share key milestones. These tailored messages helped to create a more personalized and inclusive experience than was previously possible.

To encourage participation mid-pandemic, registration fees were dropped as were minimum fundraising thresholds. Virtual meet-ups, Zoom happy hours and Facebook events helped enrich the experience for cyclists and emulate the buzz of previous years. There was even a virtual opening ceremony and national closing ceremony,

All the efforts paid off. As a result of the personalized content, more efficient Salesforce-enabled fundraising methods, and multiplatform engagement with new audiences, the Society surpassed the fundraising goal it had established *before* the pandemic started.

A valuable difference

Virtually possible

Overall, the newly reimagined event took just three months to plan and raised \$36 million for the Society, allowing the non-profit to continue providing support to individuals with MS and their families.

With nearly 24,000 participants and 100,000 views on social channels, virtual engagement far exceeded expectations. By taking the event virtual, the society made Bike MS: Inside Out even more inclusive, enabling people from a wider range of ages and physical abilities to take part.

For example, virtual participation enabled those affected with MS to take part in shorter rides online, while the integration with Strava and Zwift attracted a new audience and brought a gamification angle to the event to create deeper engagement. Cyclists and teams were able to chat online via Zwift and connect across state lines in a way that was not previously possible in person. And, most importantly, the engaging new virtual experience encouraged the event's most valuable fundraisers to return and participate once again. This engagement continued beyond the event—with riders offered discounts for future events and rewards offered for rider recruitment.

The program even helped the Society win a *Fast Company* award for Best Workplace for Innovators in the non-profit category. Despite immense disruption and in the face of snowballing event cancellations across the nation, the Society and Accenture's digital transformation of Bike MS helped keep the non-profit's race to a cure in high gear.

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