

Online to Outdoors: A Smarter Approach to R3

Using technology to engage outdoors
enthusiasts and increase participation



Solve the participation problem with modern tech

After a short-lived surge during COVID, participation in hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities is back on the decline. Older generations (historically the most active) are aging out, and younger ones aren't showing up in the same way. It's not just a cultural shift — it's a funding problem. Fewer licenses and permits sold mean fewer dollars for conservation, wildlife management, and public lands.

To address declining participation numbers and ultimately increase revenue, a national movement to help state fish and wildlife agencies and their partners has emerged, referred to as "R3." The goal: bring in new participants, keep them engaged, and re-engage those who've drifted away.

A few of the main themes that have come from broad R3 efforts:

- **Recruitment, retention, and reactivation** efforts and goals are different, and each needs its own strategy
- **Personalized outreach matters** — interests, identities, and goals aren't one-size-fits-all
- **Support looks different at every stage**, from gear recommendations and mentorship for first-timers to workshops and leadership opportunities for seasoned participants

Here's how conservation agencies can combine modern technology with more traditional tactics to create an R3 strategy that addresses participation barriers and fits the moment.



Technology's role: Turning barriers into opportunities

Now that almost everyone has a cell phone in their pocket, a digital encounter could be the first (and sometimes best) bet for engaging people in wildlife conservation. It's easier than ever to access information, search rules and regulations, or watch a how-to video. Customers can purchase licenses online and store a digital copy in case a game warden asks to see it.

Digital systems help conservation agencies reach customers, sell more licenses, and build on conservation efforts. As an added bonus, digital engagement platforms can collect customer data to help agencies improve their R3 efforts. With that knowledge, agencies can create targeted messaging, more digestible information, and easier ways to buy licenses — providing relevant support to help overcome participation barriers.

Capturing leads for your CRM

A CRM is only as powerful as the contacts it holds. So how do you grow your list? Start simple: Add an email sign-up form to your website. Use QR codes at events, run social ads, and include opt-in options during license sales, event registrations, and publication sign-ups.

The goal isn't just more names — it's better data. Where someone signs up gives you a clue about their interests. Use that to segment your lists and send the right message at the right time. For example, the sign-up source tells you what a person cares about: A trout fishing guide vs. a youth hunting event. Use that insight to tailor messages that increase engagement and turn a contact into a customer and a customer into an active participant.

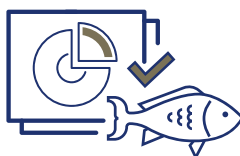
Turn customer insights into conservation with a CRM

To effectively connect with customers, you need a way to reach them — and modern technology provides numerous ways to do so. A customer relationship management (CRM) system is a critical piece of the puzzle. Think of your CRM as a digital Swiss Army knife: everything you need to reach customers — right when they're most likely to say 'yes' to the outdoors.

A CRM provides:



Current and prospective customer data



Reporting and visualization of customer data across all activities



Ability to build and manage fully evergreen, truly automated marketing

A CRM in action: Real-world R3 results

By moving away from fragmented legacy systems and consolidating into a single modern platform, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) reduced complexity and increased participation. Between January and October 2024, the agency reached over 894,000 customers with personalized messaging and educational campaigns, resulting in a \$250K revenue boost tied directly to their CRM-powered outreach.

A system designed to adapt to goals, not lock teams into old processes

Staff can now launch campaigns, analyze performance, and adjust strategy — enhancing the customer experience and improving R3 efforts without relying on outside vendors or building new tools.

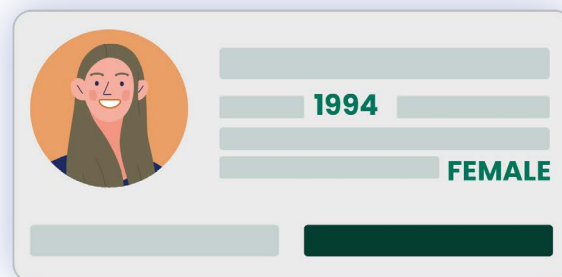
As costs and time investment come down and customer engagement goes up, agencies receive more revenue to fund their conservation mission — ensuring plentiful wildlife populations and beautiful outdoors.

Inbox to outdoors: Using email to reach the right people at the right time

Email is a direct line to customers, enabling agencies to send personalized communication to hunters, anglers, target shooters, and other outdoor enthusiasts. Compared to other marketing initiatives, email is an affordable way to maintain ongoing communication. And email analytics make it easier for staff to measure engagement and refine strategies based on what works best.

Funnel interest into action with tailored emails

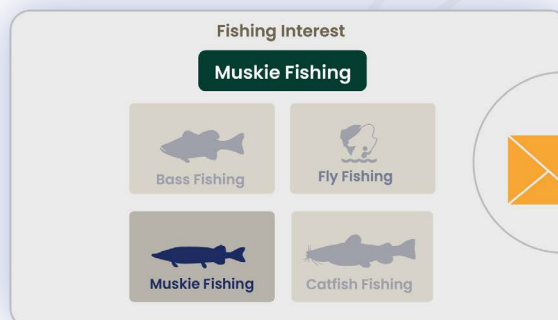
A well-executed email strategy will start conversations and encourage customers to get outdoors, purchase licenses, and contribute to conservation efforts. The key is to provide relevant, actionable, and educational information that encourages more people to get outdoors.



Millennial



Female



Here are a few ways to incorporate personalized emails:

Recruitment

Nurture prospects: Use email to engage people who have shown early interest, like those who signed up for your newsletter or downloaded a guide; provide easy, confidence-building on-ramps to participation

Welcome new participants: Send educational content to first-time event attendees and license buyers, such as beginner guides, season dates, and recommendations for gear and locations

Conservation storytelling:

Share success stories, testimonials, and conservation updates to reinforce the value of participation in outdoor activities

Retention

License and permit renewal reminders: Automated emails remind users when their hunting or fishing licenses are about to expire, making it easy for them to renew with a direct link

Event promotion: Invite people to workshops, mentored hunts, and conservation events, helping to build a stronger community

Regulation and season updates: Seasonal emails keep subscribers informed about regulation changes, new public access areas, or conservation efforts that affect their activities

Reactivation

Lapsed customer outreach: Identify individuals who no longer have an active license and send personalized reactivation campaigns that include the promotion of current, exciting hunting and fishing opportunities

Address participation barriers directly: Participation barriers come in many forms, so personalized emails make a big impact here. For example, look at licensing structures and regulations that make it more difficult for people to get out. Or, offer family packages that introduce kids to outdoor pursuits alongside their parents



A modern CRM enables you to ask your customers what motivates them or what may be preventing them from participating. Collecting this zero-party data lets you send personalized content that's most likely to help that individual get out and enjoy the outdoors.

Get better with data

Every email sign-up and click gives you information about customers. For example, take note of campaigns that drive the highest click-through and conversion rates. And cut campaigns with less engagement – the ROI isn't there.

- ✓ **Run tests** to see which subject lines, content, and images resonate
- ✓ **Compare email metrics** to other metrics such as license sales and event attendance
- ✓ **Segment contacts** by location, areas of interest, skill level, and pain points

Run better events with a dedicated platform

Many agencies are functioning with budget and staff limitations, so their network of volunteers is vital; often, those volunteers become mentors – and the face of the agency. Informed volunteers and well-organized events make a good impression on newcomers and committed enthusiasts alike.

To manage events and volunteers efficiently, conservation agencies need purpose-built tech that includes:

- Clear training material
- Sign-up forms and waivers
- Search functionality so that volunteers find the right event for their expertise
- A way to record volunteer hours

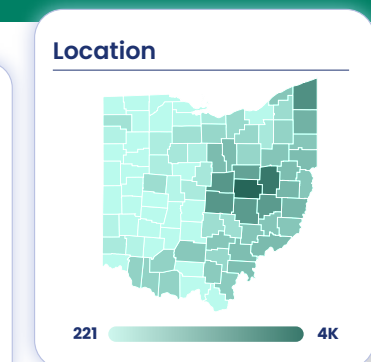
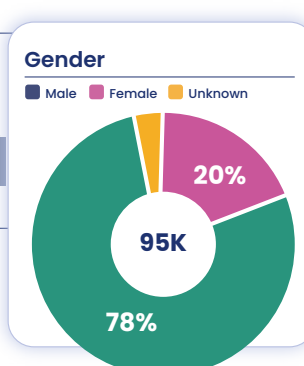
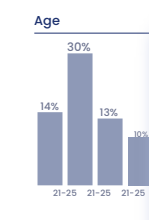
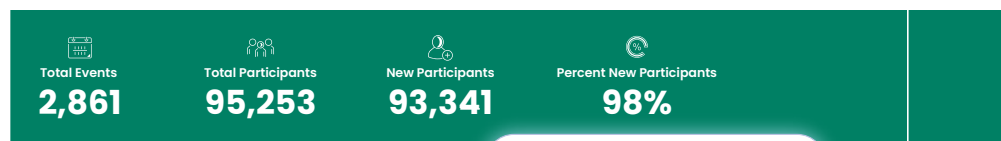
By nurturing and valuing their volunteer network, organizations can significantly expand their capacity and impact.

A proper digital event management solution also enhances participant experiences:

- Create different courses based on demand
- Review and evaluate customer data – all in one system

A good event management solution enables agencies to track and prove event success instead of relying on guesswork. And when coupled with a modern CRM, you can easily maintain and grow your relationships with event participants.

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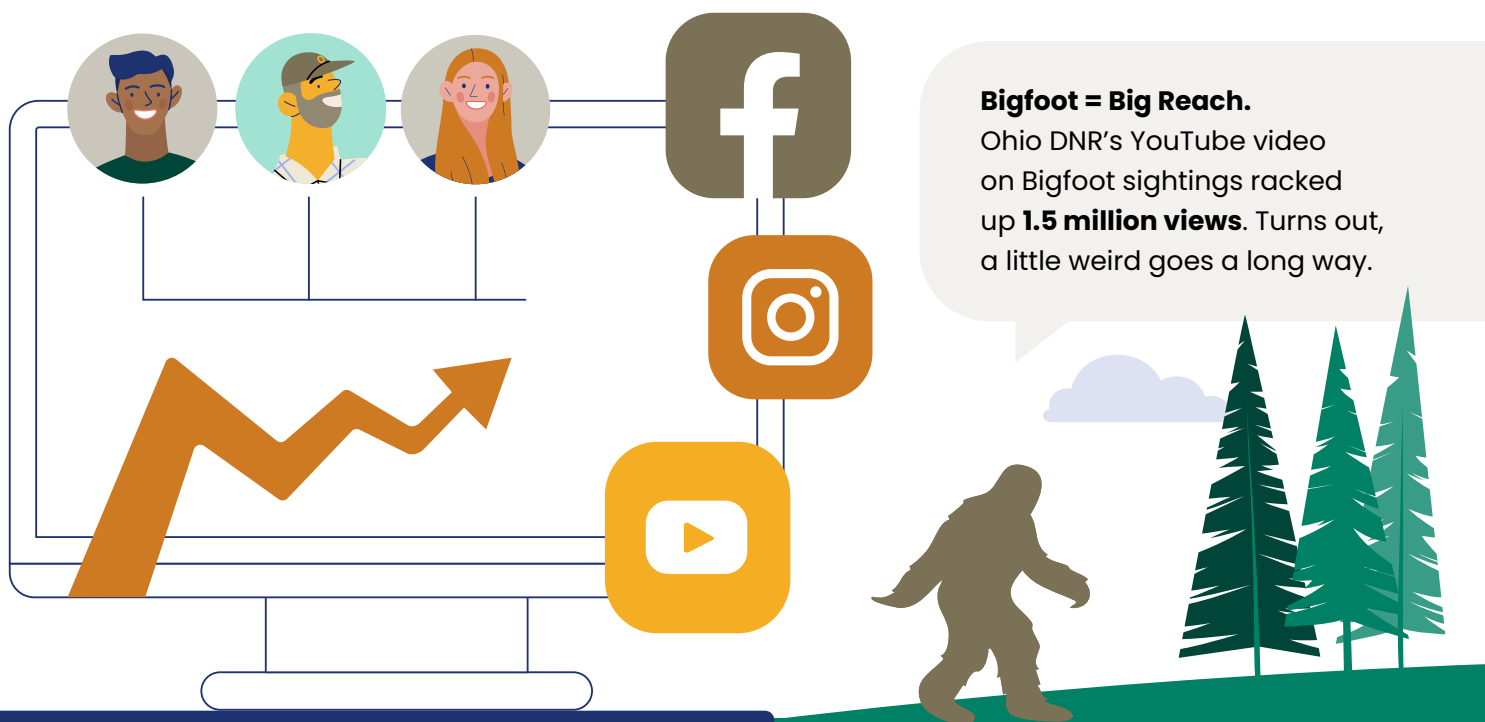


Social media has serious reach, but don't take it too seriously

Social media is another way to reach customers, and many outdoor enthusiasts will follow you on social media. Use social media to promote content and volunteer events, share helpful information, or create how-to videos. Most importantly, have fun.

Each social channel has its quirks, so content for one isn't necessarily content for all in this case. Different social media platforms serve different purposes:

- **Facebook:** Best for community building, event promotion, and storytelling through posts, live videos, and groups
- **YouTube:** Great for tutorials, how-to videos, conservation documentaries, and showcasing agency initiatives
- **Instagram:** Ideal for visually showcasing outdoor experiences, featuring scenic locations, and sharing short-form reels and stories
- **X (Twitter):** Useful for real-time updates, regulations, and quick conservation alerts — the prime place for humor and memes
- **Threads:** Somewhat of a mixture of the humor of X, the imagery of Instagram, and educational videos and content — authenticity wins here, especially when tied to current pop culture



Using social media in your R3 strategy

Recruitment

- **“How-To” tutorials:** Teach skills like how to use a duck call, set up a tree stand, or clean a fish
- **Conservation wins:** Highlight success stories of habitat restoration, species recovery, or community involvement
- **Highlight opportunities:** Share events, webinars, or podcasts that connect outdoors enthusiasts with the broader conservation community

Retention

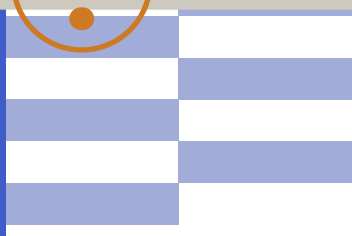
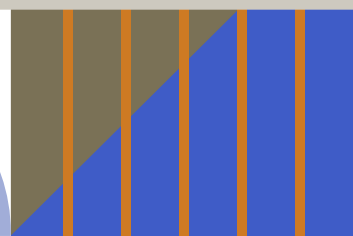
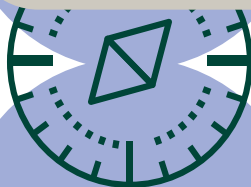
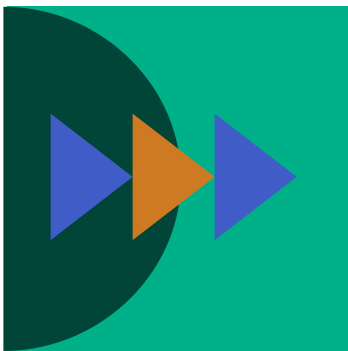
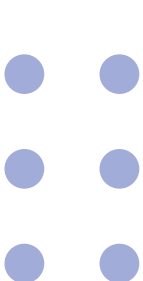
- **Regulation and season updates:** Explain rule changes and season start dates
- **Community stories:** Encourage followers to share their hunting, fishing, or target shooting photos – feature experienced and new participants
- **Combat misinformation:** Myth-busting is a fun way to correct misconceptions about hunting, fishing, and conservation efforts
- **Information about access and opportunities:** Share updates on freshly stocked local urban fishing ponds or highlight new or different seasons (like small game or trapping)

Reactivation

- **Time management ideas:** Provide checklists, tips, and information to reintroduce hunting or fishing into their weekly routines
- **Challenges or contests:** Draw in experienced, lapsed participants with invites to upcoming competitions

SMS (text messages) and app notifications

Notifications (via app or text) are a powerful addition to an R3 communications strategy because they reach people directly and effectively – but use sparingly and only when someone has opted in. Reserve SMS for things like reminding volunteers of upcoming events, temporary closures or restrictions, and emergency notifications (e.g., floods or fires).



You have their attention, now what?

Engaging customers is not the end game. You have to build relationships in order to grow participation and revenue.

Maximize participation by making it easy to get a license or permit

As states use technology to increase efficiency, in-person sales at bait shops and retailers are being supplemented by online licensing platforms. With legacy systems, even small changes require months of work. Digital platforms allow agencies to update license types, adjust rules, and track sales in real-time, cutting out delays and freeing up staff to focus on conservation.

How digital license technology benefits customers

Achieving conservation missions depends on revenue from hunters, anglers, and target shooters, but complexity undermines participation. Digital license and permit sales make purchase (and renewal) simple for customers:

- Buy and renew hunting and fishing licenses instantly, from anywhere
- Digital licenses eliminate the need for paper copies, allowing users to store licenses in a mobile app or email receipt as proof of license instead of requiring a printed copy
- Mobile accounts give customers 24/7 access to digital licenses, even in areas without internet
- E-tagging and reporting systems allow hunters to digitally tag and report harvests in real-time
- Auto-renewal is possible for hunting and fishing licenses, so there's no break in revenue flow or customer participation
- Lottery draws and harvest rules are clearly spelled out and are efficiently and equitably executed
- No downtime during peak times, so every customer has the same access

Get it right from the get-go with a smarter RFP

The RFP process can inadvertently reinforce limitations: Requirements are written to mirror current processes and regulations rather than reimagine them. As a result, agencies end up soliciting systems that enshrine existing complexity and fail to achieve the agility and user-friendly design that modern digital government aspires to.

The smarter approach is to align modernization efforts with regulatory and process simplification. States that undertake a thoughtful review of their licensing rules, eliminate unnecessary steps, and streamline processes are not just creating a better experience for the public. They're also clearing the path for modern technology solutions that are more scalable, sustainable, and future-ready.

By modernizing regulations and streamlining processes first, agencies position themselves to adopt modern platforms that can evolve with them, reduce long-term costs, and invite more people into the outdoors.

Tech that hits the trails is critical for supporting R3

R3 initiatives help advance the conservation work natural resource agencies do by getting more people involved and bringing in more funds.

Modern technology gives agencies the ability to offer a better customer experience and lower barriers to entry for outdoors participation. R3 efforts that make use of tech are more likely to be successful because they make it easier to access information and experiences, increasing revenue to support conservation outcomes.

Additional resources:

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