

# The Nonprofit

How Nonprofit modernized their mail to find solution for donation checks



## ORGANIZATION

Desire Street Ministries

## INDUSTRY

Nonprofit

## MISSION

Desire Street believes that the best investment for lasting change in a neighborhood is time, presence, and relationship. They work to love thy neighbor by revitalizing under-resourced neighborhoods through spiritual and community development.



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## Summary

For 30 years, Desire Street Ministries has provided spiritual and community support to under-resourced neighborhoods. Founded in the 9th Ward of New Orleans to work directly with the community, the nonprofit, now headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, expanded its mission to coaching and caring for ministry leaders across the south. With modernized operations and a remote workforce, Desire Street Ministries helps leaders develop thriving, sustainable urban ministries.

## Challenges

In early 2020, Desire Street Ministries began preparing to reduce their overhead costs. One way they did so was to move from a large office with steadily increasing rent to a more affordable Atlanta coworking location that caters to nonprofits. To make the move, they had to make some operational changes that would ensure their team could work as remotely as possible.

“We had an antiquated server in the closet running Windows 2008 and clunky solutions,” says James Gadsby, COO and Development Director of

Desire Street Ministries. “Over the past few years, we migrated all our platforms to the cloud and upgraded our technologies. We were looking for more ways to automate administrative tasks, especially those with labor-intensive processes. We would rather our team be working with our leaders and supporting our donors instead of scanning checks and batching them for deposit.”

The Desire Street Ministries team also had anxiety about how moving offices would impact their mail processing. “We’ve moved once since I’ve been on staff, and another time about five years prior to that,” says Gadsby. “With every move, the mail change process has always been a challenge.” They wanted a mail solution that would remove the possibility of difficult office moves in the future.

## The Problem at Large

While much of our lives are digital, small regional nonprofits still send and receive a lot of postal mail—in particular, donation checks. Many nonprofits send out paper newsletters or appeal letters with return envelopes enclosed. Those checks in the mail often make up a significant portion of their operating budget and must be carefully cataloged and deposited. If a nonprofit doesn’t have regular access to its mail, delays in depositing checks can mean a disruption to the organization’s ability to continue its work.

Organizations, including Desire Street Ministries, scan the envelope and the check whenever they receive a donation so they can refer to the record when they’re sending out tax letters to donors. These details are important—if someone writes a check on December 31st, but the postmark on the envelope is January 2, the tax benefits do not count until the next year.

The staff time required to carefully scan and keep track of mail, including scanning and depositing all of the checks, can take a big chunk out of a small organization’s resources. The work, though tedious, needs to happen, so nonprofits often look for ways to improve the process.

Nonprofits, like many businesses, are also attempting to modernize their processes and create more opportunities for remote work. They experience the same pressures from employees that want work-life flexibility, and they

experience the same benefits from creating efficiencies and technical redundancies in their processes.

## Solution

Desire Street Ministries looked at numerous options to automate their postal mail and check depositing. “Earth Class Mail had the full suite of solutions that could help us achieve both automation to remove manual tasks and support for a remote workforce. It was the best choice with the deepest and greatest breadth of offerings,” says Gadsby.

Moreover, Earth Class Mail also had the integrations Desire Street Ministries needed to hit the ground running. Gadsby had already brought the nonprofit fully digital in terms of document storage. He shared, “That integration with Dropbox just made it much simpler.”

Automatic check processing was also a huge selling point for Gadsby. The nonprofit originally planned to use Earth Class Mail for mail processing and then use a bank lockbox process for checks—where checks are sent to a lockbox at a bank, and the bank processes the deposits. As they started evaluating solutions, Gadsby saw that Earth Class Mail offered automatic check deposits as well. “The fact that it was bundled together made it a strategic decision for us.”

Gadsby began testing the Earth Class Mail solution in January 2020 by including the address on some return envelopes in appeal letters. “We loved it from the beginning,” he says. “Our plan was to ramp up the process slowly through the spring. But on March 13th [when COVID-19 social distancing began in the Atlanta area], we went fully remote and updated our address everywhere as fast as we could.”

Gadsby was able to assure donors that Desire Street Ministries would continue getting its mail, including donation checks, while the team worked remotely. “It’s been a tremendous lifesaver for us,” he says, “to keep all this process flowing and not miss a beat.”

“Having all of our platforms in the cloud, including our physical mail, and having deposits done for us has enabled us to continue getting the necessary funding to keep our operations going,” says Gadsby. “Otherwise, there would

have been all this anxiety of trying to figure out how we were going to handle everything that was happening.”

## Results

For Desire Street Ministries, timing has been everything. Taking their postal mail digital was part of their operational improvement plan for 2020, but it became critically important once the COVID-19 crisis began. “The key thing for us,” says Gadsby “has been continuity of our operation without disruption. Our Board of Directors is thrilled with our ability to keep the organization going without missing a beat. We have access to what we need. It’s more cost-effective for us. It freed up our staff to be more efficient and focused on our core mission, not dealing with time-consuming administrative tasks.”

After signing up, Gadsby was impressed by the onboarding process, which involved a call with an Earth Class Mail representative. “She answered all our questions, helped us with configuration settings, and did real-time setup,” says Gadsby. “It was enormously helpful.”

Gadsby also really appreciates that as the COVID-19 situation evolves, he doesn’t feel rushed to get staff back in the office or unnecessarily jeopardize employee safety. “We have all the solutions that we need in the cloud and digitally so people can continue doing their work from home safely.”