

# HIGH TOUCH CAMPAIGN BOOSTS RETENTION

by Tia Talbert



The [Ledger](#) in Lakeland, FL (a New York Times regional newspaper) was able to substantially increase the retention among new subscribers through a letter campaign called "High Touch."

## Three-Letter Campaign

The High Touch campaign consists of three letters designed to educate new subscribers about the newspaper and give them a sense of interaction with the paper.

"Retention has been a focus for The Ledger since 2000," explains Melanie Coker, circulation promotions manager at The Ledger. "This program was one of our first initiatives to build relations with our new customers and is still in effect today."

## The Publisher Letter

During the first week of delivery, a letter package is mailed to new subscribers. The package includes a letter that is signed by publisher John Fitzwater, an instructional guide for their automated phone service, important contact phone numbers, a Ledger calendar (only during 2000), a reader's guide, and a coupon for a classified ad.

The subscribers also receive a call during their first week to verify satisfactory delivery service. During this call they are asked to answer two profile questions (seasonal or year-round and the age group of the most frequent reader). This first package allows them to make an initial contact with their new customers and potentially gain some quality information about them through the classified ad coupon and the profile questions. They plan to use this information to enhance their existing customer database.

## The Circulation Letter

The second letter, from circulation director Sam Diaz, inquires about the quality of their delivery service, invites them to join their Easy Pay credit card payment program, and includes a service-focused survey with some demographic profile questions. It's mailed two weeks after the initial publisher package.

This package is designed to encourage the participation of the customer in making the newspaper work for them. It gives the Ledger the opportunity to find out about service issues and gain some supplementary demographic information about their customers that might not otherwise be reported. It also provides the opportunity to get these new customers into their credit card program which ensures better retention.

## The Editorial Letter

The third letter, from executive editor Skip Perez, encourages subscribers to forward suggestions and comments regarding the newspaper and includes a product-focused survey. Another call is made to verify satisfactory delivery service as well.

This final contact lets these customers know that their opinion is highly valued by the Ledger. It empowers them to make a difference in the way their product is produced. The compiled survey information has been very helpful to the news staff.

## Segmentation and Control

The Ledger determined the appropriate pieces for each segment of the campaign by running the initial eight weeks of the program with a target group that consisted of half of their market. Their control group was the other half of their market. This helped them to identify which pieces of the total campaign would be most successful at each point during the campaign.

The Ledger continually works to develop the perfect tracking and measurement system for this retention campaign. They focus on how many of the targeted customers are still active by tracking groups of new customers based on their start week. This information is updated weekly to determine the mix of paid vs. unpaid customers and complaints are monitored as well. By tracking in this manner they are able to see their customers in a way that was not previously available to them.

## Results

So what do the results of this program look like? Well, after mailing to 10,397 new subscribers, they found that 4,800 of them continue to be active to date. This is 46 percent retention over a 45 week period! The retention goes up to 64 percent after adjusting for seasonality.

Compared to the control group, eight-week retention had improved by five percentage points and 45-week retention had improved by 11 percentage points! Thanks to an in-house printing operation, the campaign cost The Ledger only \$2 per new subscriber.

"The coupons add value, the surveys promote interaction and the encouragement to join our auto credit card program (Easy Pay) adds convenience for the new customer. I can't think of a better way to invest \$2 than with three effective contacts," boasts Coker.

In the future they would like to improve their analysis by determining critical payment windows and tailoring programs to meet those subscribers' needs. They plan to do this by finding "pressure points" during the subscribers' lifecycle.

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