

Three mags, three tactics

Objective: provoke a subscription. Method: provide incentive

BY SCOTT BULLOCK

Circulation professionals are always on the hunt for a new idea, or a new twist on an old idea. Anything that can save money, build circulation, or improve service levels is welcome. Here are a few praiseworthy examples I've noticed lately.

Online gift cards

If you haven't checked out *Owl's* website lately at www.owlkids.com, I suggest you do.

Click on the "subscribe & renew online" button, then navigate to gift cards. You'll find three beautifully designed gift cards, one each for *Chirp*, *chickaDEE* and *Owl*. If you have a colour printer, you'll be amazed at the quality reproductions.

Charmaine Thompson's circ team at *Owl* is blessed with large gift files, which renew at remarkable rates. The genesis for the online gift cards came from grandparents, aunts, uncles and parents who sometimes became frantic when giving gifts or renewing gifts at the last minute.

"We wanted to be responsive to a need that our customers identified," says Thompson. "Plus, it gave our customer service reps an easy and quick response to appeals for help."

Owlkids.com launched the printable version in December, and had over 1,400 hits to this unique URL. They are now working on an e-card for 2007, based on the success of this online printable version.

Gift givers love the immediacy. No waiting for the cards to arrive days later, no potential for cards being damaged in the mail. Plus, savings are realized in printing, lettershop, and postage and handling.

"Online gift cards have huge saving potential for us at *Owlkids*," says Thompson, "because the volume of gifts we process each year is extraordinary."

The Classic 2-for-1 pitch

It's an oldie but a goodie—2-for-1 deals never go out of style. *Ski Canada* publisher Paul Green provided Abacus Circulation chief Jon Spencer with a full-page ad and a fabulous ski holiday to work with. And he made the most of it with an effective pitch to readers.

The house ad is classic, employing a "Grand Prize!" starburst, a "You and a friend could WIN 6 days of superb skiing" stamp, and the word "WIN" in big, bold and red type, linked to subscribing.

Reference is also made to a URL skicanadamag.com/ultimate, where you can find



Owl's online gift cards can be printed on the spot



Ski Canada's 2-for-1 pitch is an oldie but a goodie

the contest rules, which is better than wasting space in-book on irritating fine print.

The best part, however, is the offer itself, and how it's presented. Using the "Johnson Box" technique the offer is made crystal clear: Note also that *Ski Canada* took the opportunity to collect e-mail addresses and daytime phone numbers on the response card—vital info for today's circ files.

If you're prepared to sacrifice some circulation revenue in order to grow your ratebase, this is as good as it gets. Response rates during preliminary testing were lifted by 73%.

The power of partnerships

LouLou is arguably one of the best examples of a new paid-circ launch in recent memory. Debuting with the September 2004 issue, Rogers' shopping magazine has quickly grown to almost 200,000 paid circulation, with 133,000 English and 69,000 French.

LouLou attracts readers by tailoring contests and discounts in both its national and regional editions in Toronto, Vancouver and Alberta, which drives readers to cash registers in those critical markets.

Finding a premium that significantly lifts response rates is important to circulation professionals and it appears that *LouLou* has done just that with its co-branded *LouLou/VIP SPC* shopping card. The project was piloted last fall



LouLou partnered with Student Price Card for a pitch

and showcased the card as an incentive to subscribe in the November, December and January/February issues. The in-book creative was fantastic, and the card offers subscribers discounts at hundreds of participating retailers across the country.

Leveraging SPC's rich database, e-mail blasts were aimed at females 18 to 35. The e-creative was first-rate and "has yielded favourable response rates and good pay-up rates," according to consumer marketing director Ellen L'Ecuyer.

The offer can also be seen at <http://www.louloumagazine.com/shoppingcard>.

The program has been so successful it will be featured in a number of new business initiatives this year and in *LouLou's* traditional mailed renewal series, a sure sign that Ellen is being humble. **M**



Scott Bullock operates *Circ3*, a circulation consultancy. He has been consumer marketing director with *Toronto Life*, managing partner with *Coast to Coast Newsstand Services* and in 2003 was named *Magazine Marketer of the Year* by the *Circulation Management Association of Canada*. His column appears regularly in *Masthead*. You can reach him at scott@circ3.com.