

GEORGIA AQUARIUM

World's largest aquarium uses email to create a loyal customer base and drive online ticket sales with the help of Silverpop's Strategic Services group

The Company

Georgia Aquarium officially opened its doors to the public in 2005. As the world's largest aquarium, it features more animals than any other aquarium in more than 8 million gallons of water. Through a path of more than 60 exhibits, the Aquarium tells a global water story, with features modeled after the greatest zoos and aquariums in the world.

The Challenge

As a new facility, Georgia Aquarium was challenged with building relationships with three main audiences: Aquarium visitors, business sponsors and donors. Email was viewed as the primary communications channel for all three, with a particular focus on using email to engage with its visitors.

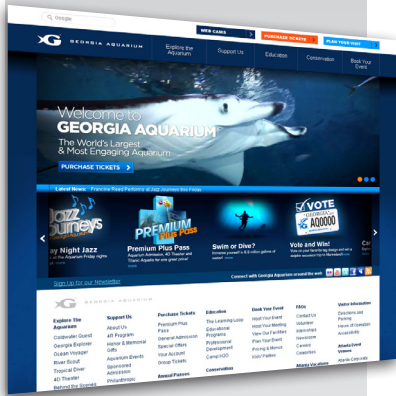
As a much-heralded new entity in the Atlanta area, the Aquarium understood that it had to utilize email to its full advantage to communicate with visitors to help drive online ticket sales, promote events and build its loyal customer base.

In the early day of the Aquarium's email program, one of the most significant challenges was balancing its need to promote message content according to its recipients' desires. "Ironically, we often would hear conflicting feedback from our email subscribers, with many saying 'You don't talk to me enough' and others saying 'You send me too many promotions,' said Kristie Cobb Hacke, vice president, development & membership, Georgia Aquarium. "We knew that we would have our work cut out for ourselves in learning how to best communicate with our varying audiences, and that we would need to partner with Silverpop to understand best practices for email."

The Solution

Georgia Aquarium is currently using Silverpop Engage to send monthly newsletters, news and event updates, and special offers to its more than 620,000 Aquarium aficionados. Over the past few years, the Aquarium has worked closely with Silverpop's Strategic Services group on both general email strategy and specific campaigns to build its email marketing program. Silverpop's Strategic Services is a group of dedicated email marketing experts well versed in all aspects of engagement marketing strategy, campaign management and communications.

The Aquarium has seen a significant transformation in the way it communicates to its target audiences since its inception. "When the Aquarium first opened, the strategy was to deliver as much information to as many



Challenges

- Brand new entity charged with building relationships with visitors, donors and sponsors
- Desire to use email to drive online ticket sales, promote events and build its loyal customer base
- Ability to balance its need to promote message content according to email subscribers' preferences

Benefits

- Working closely with Silverpop's Strategic Services group to implement email best practices resulting in increased ticket sales via email and a positive retention numbers
- Use of Silverpop's Survey offering as both a market research and customer satisfaction tool
- The Aquarium saw a 5X increase in open rates and 7X increase in click-through rates through targeted emails
- Generation of \$500K in annual ticket sales from its email marketing efforts

“Silverpop is our No. 1 communications tool at Georgia Aquarium. Working closely with Silverpop's Strategic Services group has allowed us to find the balance in communicating with our target audiences. Through careful analysis and testing, we have been able to fine-tune how to communicate to our subscribers using targeted emails, resulting in a 5X increase in open rates and a 7X increase in click-through rates, thus creating a more loyal customer base and driving \$500K in online ticket sales annually via email.”

Kristie Cobb Hacke
VP of Development
Georgia Aquarium

people as possible very quickly,” Hacke said. “After the initial rush of excitement, it became necessary to begin crafting and delivering targeted messages to keep people engaged.” With the advice of Silverpop’s Strategic Services group, the Aquarium learned over time how to continually fine tune its message. “We tried out many new tactics to see how our target audiences would respond, and we quickly learned that we needed to communicate to these audiences with varying content and frequency to keep them engaged,” Hacke said.

One example in which Silverpop’s Strategic Services group advises Georgia Aquarium is its annual Aqua Vino event, a wine tasting and charity auction event open to the public. Using email as the primary promotional channel to sell out the event, the Aquarium worked with the Strategic Services group to create a targeted plan that involved segmenting its target audiences, among which were its annual pass holders and attendees from previous years among others, into six different groups. Each group received personalized messages about different aspects of the event with varying frequency. For instance, one group received an email focusing on the wines being served at the event while another group received an email about the auction. The Aquarium tracked responses for each group separately with the goal of separate targeting later on, if necessary.

As people began buying tickets for the Aqua Vino event, the Aquarium would use Silverpop Engage’s dynamic content capabilities to include promotional messaging about “getting your friends to come” in an effort to drive additional ticket sales. During the campaign, Silverpop also advised the Aquarium on brand placement, messaging and timing. By taking a targeted approach, the event sold out quicker than the previous year with a greater percentage of tickets being sold online than in previous years and in a shorter period of time.

Always wanting to learn how its programs can be improved, the Aquarium became a heavy user of Silverpop Engage’s Survey offering to get customer feedback firsthand. “At the Aquarium, we utilize the Silverpop Engage Survey offering as both a market research and customer satisfaction tool,” Hacke said. “Examples range from using the Survey product to better understand how our guests perceive our sponsors to a customer satisfaction survey for our annual pass holders as well as follow-up surveys to our event attendees. Because we integrate promotional offerings with our surveys, we see response rates as high as 50 percent. We use the survey feedback as a closed-loop process for optimizing our marketing programs.”

The Results

Through the advice of Silverpop’s Strategic Services group, Georgia Aquarium has been able to implement email best practice strategies, such as employing a preference center, subject line testing, list segmentation, personalization and use of dynamic content, which has enabled the Aquarium to deliver the right message at the right time to drive people to the Aquarium Web site, drive ticket sales and ultimately grow its ever-increasing loyal customer base.

“Silverpop is our No. 1 communications tool at Georgia Aquarium,” Hacke said. “Working closely with Silverpop’s Strategic Services group has allowed us to find the balance in communicating with our target audiences. Through careful analysis and testing, we have been able to fine-tune how to communicate to our subscribers using targeted emails, resulting in a 5X increase in open rates and a 7X increase in click-through rates, thus creating a more loyal customer base and driving \$500K in online ticket sales annually via email.”

“Ultimately the greatest success for the Aquarium is the frequency and flexibility with which we can communicate,” Hacke said. “On average our members receive three mailings per month from us. The content is fresh and relevant, they have access to special offers that can be purchased or taken advantage of immediately, and we can let them know about upcoming events of interest to them in a very timely fashion. This creates a more engaged audience, which has resulted in increased ticket sales via email and a positive effect on overall retention numbers.”

To find out more about Silverpop’s Engage solution and how it can benefit your company, please contact us toll-free at 1-866-745-8767

Visit us at www.silverpop.com