

Buckhead Beats the Summer Slowdown

For most of the year, Buckhead Life Restaurant Group's nine Atlanta eateries are some of the area's most popular dining destinations. But even they are prone to a fate that befalls many restaurants: the summer slowdown. Three years ago, the group decided to do something about that, launching a multi-wave direct mail campaign designed to drive business all summer long. That program still is going strong today, with a mailing from the first of the summer's drops landing in the Who's Mailing What! Archive in May (Archive code #521-707214-0605).

#1 For a prospect, the Dine Around Program is pretty simple: She receives this 5¼" x 7¼" envelope effort in the mail. Inside is a fully negotiable \$30 gift card for one of Buckhead's nine restaurants, affixed to a cardstock, four-panel brochure. The brochure explains the terms of the offer:

Experience extraordinary dining using the enclosed \$30 Dine Around Card at the specified restaurant this month. When you do, you will receive another card to use at a different restaurant the next month. This giving continues throughout the summer, if you use each month's Dine Around Card.

But for Buckhead and Fulfillware, the Atlanta-based mailing services company that worked with it on this campaign, the program is a little more complex.

First, there's the multi-wave component of the program. "The original design was to do a really large mailing at the start of the season and let people carry it through," recounts Stacie Hanna, Buckhead's director of marketing. "But when I crunched the numbers, we realized we would have great response up front and less toward the end. To maintain response over a four month period, we knew we would have to keep the mailings going out." The end result is four mail cycles: 25,000 households in May; 20,000 each in June and July; and 10,000 in August. Each drop occurs on the 25th or 26th of the month, and the card is valid for the following month, explains Fulfillware President Henry Lewin.

There's also the challenge of identifying the right names to include in each drop. The over-



This simple gift card mailer delivered big value both for Buckhead Life Restaurant Group and its customers. To order: 215-238-5225, Archive code #521-707214-0605.

all list was comprised of Buckhead's housefile and prospects from a number of sources, including magazines, membership directories and charities. The housefile was weighted using an RFM analysis to identify the customers with the deepest relationships with the organization; best customers were placed into the file for the first mail drop, so they would have the opportunity to enjoy all four gift certificates, explains Hanna.

Each list also was balanced with a selection of prospects; those with the best possibility for conversion were loaded into the front end of the campaign, says Lewin.

Special care also was taken with the hygiene and deduping of each list. "We used Postalsoft for most of the merge/purge," states Lewin, who adds that custom address-level match functions were used to ensure no household received more than one card.

So that Buckhead could track response, the cards include a personal ID number that corresponds to the recipient. That number also appears as a key code on the outer envelope. Match at this level, with 100 percent accuracy, meant the work had to be done by hand, contends Lewin. "We would never [do] anything like this through a machine or even a camera system. These were all done by hand. The card was inserted by hand and then matched to the envelope by hand," he says.

Overall, asserts Hanna, the challenges were well worth the reward. She reports that response to the 2006 campaign has been between 20 percent and 30 percent, and there's been a significant increase in continuance over past years as well.

And it's not just the high response rates that have Buckhead pleased. "The buzz around the program is a hoot," says Hanna. "The calls that we get every day, from people wanting to get on the program or thanking us for the program—that level of engagement is great."

—Tracy A. Gill

IDEAS IN Action

When planning a project with as much handwork as this Buckhead Life Restaurant Group mailing, make sure to budget more time for all that extra production work. "We budgeted in-house for the quantities we were doing [75,000 mailings], three to four business days to get the handwork complete. That includes both inserting the card and the match," states Henry Lewin, president of Fulfillware, the mailing services agency that worked with Buckhead on this project.

FULLILLWARE • 1185 Logan Circle • Atlanta GA 30318

Phone 404-355-2939 • Fax : 404-355-3039 • www.fulfillware.com • e-mail: henry@fulfillware.com