

# Intrepid Travel enhances email marketing profitability.

## • Background

The small group adventure travel company, Intrepid Travel, was created in 1989 by a Melbourne couple with a passion to get travellers off the beaten track.

The success of the Australian company has been prolific and today, Intrepid Travel has approximately 800 staff covering more than 450 different trip adventures to more than 90 countries around the world.

## • Situation/challenges

Intrepid Travel first embarked on an email marketing strategy 12 years ago, starting with a very simple text e-newsletter.

At first, the Intrepid Travel team managed the e-newsletter in-house. However as subscriber numbers grew from 20,000 to approx 470,000 this was no longer possible and Intrepid Travel required a more sophisticated end to end email service.

“Our in-house system was unable to demonstrate campaign effectiveness through its limited reporting capabilities. The deliverability of emails also began to suffer as subscriber numbers increased,” said Sue Elliot, E-newsletter Manager and Intrepid Express Editor at Intrepid Travel. “Around 40 per cent of messages weren’t being delivered; this was due to inaccurate customer data and our lack of knowledge around the ISP protocols to separate spam from legitimate emails.”

Intrepid Travel undertook a full review of its email marketing strategy and calculated a \$5 acquisition cost per subscriber.

Intrepid Travel soon discovered the critical need to manage ISP relationships. Despite only sending emails to opt-in contacts, the company received blacklisting notices from Hotmail and Yahoo. Its email communications were being incorrectly categorised as spam.

“Without detailed reporting to track the success of our campaigns, it was hard to persuade management that the email channel could be improved” said Elliot. “Added pressure came from the economic downturn. As was the case for most businesses we experienced an increasing need to justify our budgets, but without a specialist service we were unable to focus the marketing spend where needed due to our inability to track results.”

Intrepid Travel researched the cost of purchasing a solution to assist in its email marketing activity. It identified that conservatively one in five bookings had been influenced by email marketing. The department presented a strong business case for utilising the services of an external email marketing provider by highlighting the possible ROI that could be achieved.

## • Solution

The company conducted a global audit of five email marketing providers. It selected Experian CheetahMail as the best provider and one that offered local teams as well as global capabilities and support.

With a local support team based in Australia, Intrepid Travel could roll out the email platform from its Australian headquarters to its global offices with minimum delay.

Using Experian CheetahMail, Intrepid Travel distributes more than 1.5 million emails per month.

## Results

Experian CheetahMail success with Intrepid Travel campaigns produced:

DELIVERABILITY  
INCREASED TO  
**99.5%**

IN EACH CAMPAIGN  
**170,000**  
ADDITIONAL EMAILS  
REACH RECIPIENTS

**OVER \$100,000**  
REVENUE GENERATED  
IN ONE MONTH

Elliot said that, "All email communications are tailored to meet a specific purpose. Intrepid Express, our weekly e-newsletter, is a relationship-building communication intended to inspire people to travel; it's not a hard sell. We also give away a trip a week to make the e-newsletter attractive to subscribers.

"Our other main electronic tool is a monthly list of specials. We have a rather complicated systems set up, with separate subscriber lists for our specials and Intrepid Express, due to the varying marketing approach of these e-newsletters. Previously it was an onerous task to maintain the two lists but with Experian CheetahMail this has become an automated process."

IntrepidTravel relies on Experian CheetahMail for segmented database management, distribution and reporting services to ensure maximum deliverability and insight into the email marketing results. The company's in-house IT and marketing departments can now use their expertise to focus on the content development and design of the email campaigns.

Elliot commented that, "Experian CheetahMail assists in keeping our database clean and enables us to segment the list by country of residence. We currently send out e-newsletters for subscribers in Australia, New Zealand, the US, Canada, the UK, Europe and South Africa, to match the main demographics of our travellers.

"This is vital as we recognise consumers are increasingly bombarded with opt in emails and spam. Relevance to our readers is so important to build trust, provide information they enjoy and ultimately sell more adventure trips."

IntrepidTravel also works with Experian CheetahMail to develop tailored responses to consumer behaviour. If someone clicks on an article about China in Intrepid Express, the company can use this insight to tailor the communications to this specific traveller in future weeks.

#### ● Results

With more than 470,000 subscribers around the world IntrepidTravel's email marketing program is at the core of its overall marketing strategy. Since bringing Experian CheetahMail onboard the focus on email marketing as part of the total marketing mix has been raised from 5 per cent to 30 per cent.

The success of the email communications has quickly gone from approximately 60 per cent to 99.5 per cent in terms of deliverability. This means that more than 170,000 additional emails are being delivered.

Before working with Experian CheetahMail, IntrepidTravel suffered wasted investment with poor deliverability rates. However, recent figures show a significant improvement, with a \$45 average increase in the revenue made per month through each individual subscriber.

The reporting functionalities made available through Experian CheetahMail provide insight into the correlation between those receiving the email communications and those booking trips. This information helps guide other sales and marketing decisions within the company, such as what time of year sales are at their peak, what style of travel customer's enjoy and where they want to go next.

"In the last email campaign alone we generated nearly AU\$104,000 revenue in one month," said Elliot. "The significant increase in our ROI completely justifies the original investment we made to work with Experian.

#### ● Future

Elliot said, "In the future we are looking to further segment the database by sending out emails based on gender and age, for example targeting Intrepid Comfort trips to people over the age of 40. We also plan to work with Experian CheetahMail in setting up triggered response emails, to effectively tackle issues such as shopping cart abandonment.

"The most important thing we've learnt from our work with Experian CheetahMail is how to capitalise on our data list. Our work with Experian has been one of the most integral and rewarding marketing decisions made by our company."

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**Sue Elliot,  
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