



E-consignments: Worth e-xploring

Online consignment tickets are the next step in Internet sales, plus they offer more ways to enhance your customer database

By David Matty, Ph.D.

Internet marketing has proven benefits for waterparks. On one hand, the Internet allows the park to establish a direct channel to the consumer and enhance the customer relationship with promotional and informational communications. On the other hand, the Internet gives consumers a convenient way of buying advance tickets and avoiding long ticket-booth lines at the park. How do these two interactive efforts feed off each other?

Entertainment venues are realizing e-mail promotions to a large, homegrown customer base are one of the best ways to quickly generate online sales. But how do you grow your list? Many venues have areas on their Web sites for site visitors to enroll in e-mail clubs. This is only somewhat effective, however, because many waterparks do not yet have significant Web traffic. Plus, the sites lack a compelling reason to entice consumers to enroll in an e-mail club. But ways exist to improve your opportunities.

Online ticketing opens the door

A natural opportunity to enhance your e-mail list is with customers who buy online electronic tickets (e-tickets). Although this opportunity seems obvious because these are "customers" by definition, and you require e-mail addresses from them to complete their online transactions, many waterpark marketers miss opportunities to drive potential customers to their online ticket engines and, therefore, to

their customer e-mail lists.

Last season saw increased adoption of online ticketing for advance sales of season tickets and individual day passes. This activity is now opening the door for parks to channel group sales and ticket-consignment sales through new e-ticketing capabilities. Many venues are beginning to experiment with interactive event planners on their Web sites, which allow small groups to plan their own parties and invite the guests, all online. As a result, you can expect ticket consignment to begin undergoing a dramatic change in the 2005 season. Here's why...

Consignment ticket sales today are still largely performed via the tried-and-true technique of issuing ticket stock to participating companies for discounted purchase to their employees. At the end of the season, the companies return both the proceeds and the unsold tickets to the waterpark. The parks then reconcile these with the gate receipts. It seems simple, yet many venues are not reaping the full benefits of this sales channel.

The beauty of e-consignment

Simply put, e-consignment (sometimes called virtual consignment) allows waterparks to sell tickets online through their e-ticketing capabilities. The purchaser pays by credit card via an online transaction and prints a high-quality ticket (e-ticket) at home or work. No

physical ticket stock is involved. Park staffers scan the ticket at the gate just as they would any other ticket. The online ticketing engine may be on the company's Web site, a participating ticket aggregator or broker's Web site or on a third-party ticketing service provider's Web site.

Participating companies receive online access to the e-ticketing engine in one of two manners. The simplest way uses a unique promotion code for each company, which the purchaser enters early on in the online ticket sale. This code identifies the company and the appropriate discounted price. In the other method, the ticket purchaser logs on to his or her company's Web site Intranet, which has a private link to the waterpark's online ticket engine. The promo code is implicit in the mechanism, and this method provides more protection from abuse.

More e-consignment benefits

E-consignment gives a waterpark multiple benefits:

- **Better cash flow.** Waterparks don't have to wait until the end of the season to receive the cash. They can receive the revenue in real-time after each ticket sale.
- **Lower consignment costs.** Waterparks don't incur printing costs for consignment tickets, and they minimize the labor costs of tracking, reporting and reconciling consignment sales.
- **Collection of customer data.** For each ticket sale, the purchaser must enter customer data to complete the sale, such as name, e-mail address and ZIP code. This is valuable information for your marketing efforts, and your customer e-mail list grows for first-time online ticket purchasers.
- **More control.** Worried about abuse of the system and unintended ticket brokers cannibalizing your regular ticket sales? The interactive ticketing technology can put limits on ticket volume to individuals, companies, etc., allowing even more control than you had with ticket stock. Participating companies and associations also benefit, as do their employees or members. That makes this a win-win strategy for both

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the waterpark and its customers.


- **Convenience.** Purchasers may purchase discounted tickets 24/7 and do not burden human resources or other designated personnel who traditionally have distributed the tickets.

- **Lower handling costs.** The company or association selling the tickets doesn't endure labor costs for handling the ticket sales, so they offer the benefit with little effort or cost.

Control your e-consignment introduction

Despite these significant benefits, you should allow for a careful, controlled introduction of e-consignment at your facility. Because it builds on your e-ticketing technology, make sure you are confident in your e-ticketing capability first. Introduce e-consignment to only a few participants to test the capability in your initial season. Make this a reward for a chosen few. Also, make sure you run frequent reports to flush out problems after the initial launch.

To minimize worries over abuse, set conservative ticket-volume limits. This will make key players in your organization feel more comfortable with this new technology and give the benefits time to take root. You can always relax limits after you've gained confidence in the system.

Equally important, make sure your provider of e-ticketing and e-consignment technology understands your business requirements and your unique internal environment. And remember e-marketing initiatives are additive each season. Your benefits from new initiatives are typically multiplied in successive seasons. 



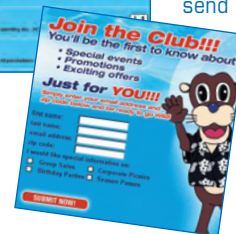
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Wild Rivers Waterpark creates e-marketing success with eye toward future

The year 2004 was a great one for Wild Rivers Waterpark, Irvine, Calif. Year after year, Wild Rivers Waterpark has increased its online sales in all categories sold on the Internet and expects to continue its success during the upcoming 2005 season. In fact, online sales for the first three months of 2005 are up 87 percent over last year, and sales for 2004 were up 60 percent from the previous year. Why? E-mail marketing. Wild Rivers' success is directly related to e-mail communications with its customer database.

Over the past few seasons, Wild Rivers has been painstakingly aggregating its customer information from online season pass sales, online club members, promotions, surveys and other online and offline means. Each year, this database grows significantly, and Wild Rivers continually communicates with this opt-in customer database using the Convergence eMarketing System.

This system allows Wild Rivers to send out personalized messages and special offers tailored to its customers' profiles and purchasing habits. These trackable e-mails allow consumers the ability to quickly respond to the offer by clicking on the special-offer link that drives them immediately back to the corresponding purchase page on the



www.wildrivers.com Web site. In addition, Wild Rivers Waterpark staff can easily deploy a promotion within hours by setting up a special-offer code using the "promotion code generator" of the Wild Rivers management Web site. Using an e-mail template, park management can insert the offer and send it to a targeted customer list.

New last year for Wild Rivers was its ability for customers to purchase e-tickets or general admission tickets. After purchasing a G.A. ticket, the customer receives an e-ticket in his or her e-mail. The customer can print the e-ticket at home and validate it at Wild Rivers Waterpark using the Galaxy Point of Sale system provided by Gateway Ticketing.

Randy Josselyn, Director of Admissions at Wild Rivers, says, "We are very excited about the next phase of our e-marketing strategy. With the success we are already having this year in season pass sales, we are excited to see how e-consignment will strengthen our community relations and help drive day pass sales."