



Durham Bulls Score 86% Open Rates and Increase Revenue Over \$100,000 with Bronto's Email Marketing Solution

Streamlined operations, Bronto's segmentation capabilities and advanced tracking features help drive sales

CHALLENGE

The Durham Bulls baseball team, a Triple-A affiliate of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, recently faced a challenge common to many online marketers – how to effectively boost sales. Until last season, the Bulls organization used a simple listserve to send emails to contacts in their system. This process proved cumbersome and did not provide effective results as there was no way to track open or conversion rates. In addition, return rates for other marketing methods such as radio/newspaper ads and direct mail campaigns were difficult to track.

After evaluating several options, assistant general manager Jon Bishop elected to implement a clearly-focused email marketing campaign designed to promote season ticket packages. The results were clear: The Bulls increased ticket package revenues by over \$100,000 in one season alone and won the 2006 Bob Freitas Award, which recognizes outstanding minor league baseball operations at each level of minor league baseball.

SOLUTION

The Durham Bulls organization implemented Bronto's email marketing solution at the beginning of the 2006 baseball season with the primary goal of increasing in-season sales of 9 or 10 game packages through targeted outreach. The Bronto team proactively worked with the Bulls organization to implement its solution with three primary focal points:

- Streamlined operations
- Segmented fan base
- Advanced tracking

STREAMLINED EMAIL MARKETING TACTICS

Bishop's first tactic was to incorporate Bronto's email marketing solution as part of an overall integrated marketing strategy in conjunction with radio, television, and newspaper ads as well as direct mail campaigns. With a high season of outreach between April and September, Bishop and his team wanted to focus their efforts on reaching out in-season by offering packages to customers who were buying and enjoying their products at that time.

For example, the Bulls ran ads and sent out a large direct mail campaign prior to opening day



to drive ticket sales. Email addresses and other information was gathered from the sold out crowd as they filed into the game. The actual game proved to be very dramatic as the Bulls pulled out a grand slam homerun to win the game.

The Bulls business management team wanted to “strike while the iron was hot” by reaching out to new contacts via email to highlight the star player from the previous night and advertise additional ticket packages for sale. The Bulls marketing team found it very easy to execute a follow-up email outreach the following day using Bronto’s technology. After the hugely successful campaign, the Bulls wanted to further streamline their email marketing process in order to do more “on-the-fly” in-season package offerings.

“Bronto has made a tremendous effort to understand our unique needs and how to best apply the technology to better serve our organization,” commented Bishop. “We are working to streamline our operations using advanced targeting and tracking features so we can further increase our ROI and sales this upcoming season.”

TARGETED FAN BASE WITH ADVANCED SEGMENTATION CAPABILITIES

With over 25,000 contacts in its email marketing database, it was important for the Bulls organization to segment those users by certain characteristics in order to provide the most timely, relevant content and drive sales. In its first season of Bronto implementation, the Bulls segmented users by factors such as whether they are season ticket holders, which homestand series they attended (i.e., a grouping of home games), the time of year they like to attend games, opponents they like to see play, and whether they attend fireworks games.

By embedding a sales offering into an email outreach containing timely and relevant content customized to a segment of users, the Bulls can increase the frequency at which they communicate with contacts while still maintaining high open and click-through rates.

“Bronto’s segmentation features allow us to better determine the types of emails our contacts are most likely to open and clickthru,” said Bishop. “After each series of outreach we can analyze our results, see which segments are clicking thru and purchasing packages and other products, and tweak our messaging to encourage even better results the next campaign.”

ROBUST REPORTING CAPABILITIES

Bronto’s email marketing solution allows the Durham Bulls to see the results of email campaigns in real-time. Reporting features allow the organization to measure interest in a certain topic by click-through rates as well as conversion rates. Unique clickstream tracking extends Bronto tracking metrics to the Durham Bulls web site by tracking clicks off the Bronto-generated email, following users throughout the Bulls site to determine user behavior. As a result, the Bulls can measure which contacts are the most valuable and then focus their targeted outreach to that particular segment.



For instance, Bishop has found that Bulls season ticket holders are the most likely segment to open and click-through each targeted email. "Our season ticket holders have a more vested interest in the organization. As one of our most valuable segments, we focus the majority of our outreach to this group by providing them with more detailed organizational and team transaction information as well as package and product offerings available for purchase," said Bishop.

FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION GOALS

In addition to Bronto's segmentation capabilities and reporting features, the Durham Bulls were also attracted to Bronto's ability to integrate with other third-party infrastructure solutions. Although the organization has only recently begun working with TicketReturn, a digital ticketing software provider, plans are in process to integrate data passed from TicketReturn to Bronto. For example, TicketReturn can gather relevant user data such as which games season ticket holders attend. By integrating this data into their Bronto account, the Bulls could easily target certain users with relevant messaging, thus providing a truly unique opportunity for an integrated marketing campaign.

The Bulls organization also has plans for a big integrated marketing push during the 2007 season. Email outreach has already begun for the season with the announcement of the availability of an online catalog containing information about this season's team, players, tickets packages, and other Bulls products. The outreach preceded a direct mail campaign in which the 24-page hard copy catalogs were mailed to previous season ticket holders.

"We plan to use email to more effectively reach our customers with offerings we traditionally provided through direct mail in the past," noted Bishop. "This strategy is going to save us even more time and money in the 2007 season."

RESULTS

The Durham Bulls organization experienced immediate success after implementing Bronto. Most importantly, Bulls fans have responded positively to the organization's email outreach. The Bulls have experienced an 86% or greater open rate when sending emails to season ticket holders. During the 2006 baseball season alone, the Bulls increased ticket package revenues by over \$100,000.

Of particular note were three highly successful email campaigns:

- First homestand game series (May 1st) - Emails were sent to 4,425 contacts who attended the first homestand series. 4,392 messages were delivered, a 99% successful delivery rate. 1,647 game packages were sold as a result, resulting in a very aggressive 37.5% conversion rate and over \$8,000 in direct revenues.
- Independence Day promotion (June 27th) – July 4th promotional package offering



was sent to 21,000 general contacts. 1,780 units were sold, resulting in direct sales of \$12,460.

- Stanley Cup promotion (July 5th) – Following the nearby Carolina Hurricanes hockey team's Stanley Cup victory, the Durham Bulls had only 2 days notice that the Hurricanes organization would bring the Stanley Cup to be on display at the July 7th game. The Bulls scrambled to send out an email to their general contact database and sold an impressive 1,170 units as a result.

The Durham Bulls credit Bronto, in part, with contributing to their recent win of the 2006 Bob Freitas Award. Organized by the national baseball publication Baseball America, the Bob Freitas Award recognizes the outstanding minor league operations at each level of minor league baseball. Named after the longtime ambassador for the minors and field representative for the National Association for many years, the award is given to teams based on sustained excellence on the business side of minor league baseball.

Regarding Durham's selection as the 2006 winner, Baseball America editor Will Lingo wrote, "The Bulls have gone from drawing around 350,000 fans a season in their first few years in the new ballpark as a Carolina League franchise, to drawing about 500,000 fans a season as an International League franchise."

"Email marketing will play an increasingly important role in our outbound marketing campaigns," said Bishop. "We barely scratched the surface last year of our Bronto capabilities and saw over \$100k in revenues. You better believe we're paying more attention to the value an integrated email marketing campaign can bring an organization. Bronto provides us with measurable results to track, so why not continue to use this resource versus spinning our wheels using other methods where our return rate is unknown or more difficult to ascertain."

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