

CASE STUDY

HOW STRATEGIC RECRUITMENT GENERATED OVER 6,600 NEW CONTENT AFFILIATES FOR RETAILER

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6,600
NEW CONTENT
AFFILIATES

JOIN RATE
127%
INCREASE

SUMMARY

One of Acceleration Partners' top clients challenged us with recruiting 6,600 new high-quality content affiliate for their program in a very short time-frame. Not only did the AP team accomplish this goal, they beat it and helped the retailer increase their affiliate join rate by 127 percent over a five month period.

TARGETED RECRUITMENT

A longtime client of Acceleration Partners wanted their affiliate recruitment to focus more on content sites. In August, 2016, the client presented our team with an attractive but formidable incentivized challenge: recruit 6,600+ new content affiliates by the end of their fiscal year (Jan 28th) and receive a substantial bonus.

“When this recruitment incentive was first presented to us, our team was simultaneously excited and daunted by it. Targeting and recruiting 6,600 new content affiliates in such a short window of time is a very tall order. We were cautiously optimistic, but up for the challenge,” said Shandi Michno, Associate Account Director at Acceleration Partners.

PINPOINTING THE PROBLEMS

The first obstacle AP's team needed to address was finding a scalable approach to recruiting 6,600 new content affiliates into the program. The second was finding ways around the unpredictable situations that emerged along the way.

“With this kind of massive recruitment effort, obstacles were to be expected. However, some of the roadblocks that our team encountered couldn't have been anticipated and slowed progress on multiple occasions,” said Kelly Ground, Senior Account Manager at Acceleration Partners.

“For example, we needed to leverage multiple third party technology platforms to find quality content affiliates and engage with them. When these technology platforms weren't working at their full capacity – or broke down altogether – we had to scramble to ensure it didn't derail our outreach and recruitment efforts. So it was a constant push and pull between maintaining momentum, tapping in to new resources and staying agile when our best laid plans didn't work out.”

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SEGMENTING SOLUTIONS

To solve for this issue, the team strategized on various scalable tactics and brainstormed about what one-on-one outreach and out-of-the-box tactics could be leveraged to drive conversions across a variety of content sites.

“It was critical for us to execute a combination of mass outreach and one-on-one personalized communications to support the recruitment of long-tail publishers. While incredibly time-consuming, we knew it would be essential for reaching them,” said Michno.

- Cross-recruitment with existing affiliates
- Mass recruitment via email platforms
- Remarketing
- Working with lead generation partners
- Investigating affiliate forums
- Leveraging affiliate network partners to reach content sites in key categories
- Posting on content discovery platforms
- Facebook ads
- Conducting affiliate referral campaigns
- Various recruitment tools
- Posting the opportunity on social platforms and networks
- Working with our sister company, BrandCycle to promote a join incentive in their blogger newsletter

TESTING & OPTIMIZATION

Throughout the process, testing was imperative. The team continuously refined their approach based on what the incoming data showed, including A/B testing content and subject lines and optimizing landing pages. They also leveraged existing industry relationships and introduced multiple incentives to drive conversions.

While the team found that their mass outreach initiatives were successful, they wanted to make sure they were reaching the right audience – content bloggers.

“We wanted to be thoughtful about only bringing the right brand advocates into our client’s program. While we wanted to reach this enticing incentive, we weren’t going to cut corners to do it,” said Ground. “We consistently scrubbed our contact lists and updated our audiences weekly—sometimes two to three times a week. We also focused on ensuring that the content bloggers we were reaching had legitimate email addresses (Gmail, Yahoo, AOL, Hotmail, etc.) and stayed away from anyone with the word “domain” or “info” in their address.”

In addition, our AP account team sought support from everyone at AP, not just those on our affiliate team.

“Team members from almost every department within our company shared our client’s recruitment opportunity on their social channels and brought in new ideas,” said Michno. “It truly was an AP team effort, further demonstrating the ‘embrace relationships’ core value we all hold in high regard as a company.”

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HITTING OUR TARGET

A combination of scalable mass outreach with individual one-to-one outreach and creative trial-and-error tactics resulted in a 50 percent increase in monthly recruitment joins for the client with over 1,000 new content affiliates joining their affiliate program in January alone.

“In general, we found that taking a strategic approach, continuously refining our messaging, teamwork, and having a “We can do it!” attitude led to our team recruiting 6,600 new content affiliates for our client and us reaching our goal,” said Ground. “Not only that, we saw a very high conversion rate and a higher-than-average activation rate of the new content affiliates.”

Overall, new affiliate joins were up 45 percent Y/Y with a 127 percent increase in join rate between August 2016 and January 2017 (when we started to ramp up our mass recruitment tactics). The mass outreach and customized communication balanced with support and encouragement activated the retailer’s new publishers to become valuable long-term partners.

ZEROING IN

What Worked:

- Utilizing existing publisher base to spread the word.
- Mass outreach with continuous updates to copy.
- A/B testing to optimize approach .
- Understanding key audience and speaking their “language” (for content we found that using “content partner” vs. “affiliate partner” increased conversion due to general terminology).
Content bloggers don’t consider themselves affiliates like coupon or loyalty sites so we found that it was important to speak to them as if they were just a content blogger.
- Retailer’s strong brand recognition.

What Didn’t Work:

- Social forums. We found them to be too general and difficult to track performance.
- Creating a one-size-fits all recruitment plan.
- Communication, messaging and outreach must be customized for each group of publishers (content, coupon, tools, etc.).