

Salem College Personalized URL Campaign Gets the Top Grade

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THE CHALLENGE

Suffice it to say, when Salem College was created, door-to-door mail delivery hadn't even begun in this country yet. But when Keiger Direct proposed using a pURL campaign for Salem's admissions office, the 230-year-old women's college (the oldest continually operating one in the United States) didn't blink. They, too, were tired of the static mailers and subsequent low response rates.

"[Salem wanted to] try something new this year when marketing to prospective 'Internet Generation' students," says Leslie Berry, a project manager for Keiger Direct, a division of Keiger Printing Company, Inc., based in Winston-Salem, NC. "They wanted to talk to students on their level."

Hence, the Salem Shines 2009 Campaign was launched, albeit on a very tight deadline. Here's how it went:

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

Make the Two Week Deadline: That's right, two weeks was all the time that Keiger Direct was given to create the campaign and get it into the mail.

Reduce Salem's Budget by 20 Percent: Well, on the bright side, they had less time to spend money. "Due to the economic hardship that has affected almost everyone, the budget had to be reduced by 20 percent. Keeping this in mind, we reduced the number of students mailed to by 20 percent as well, from 100,000 to 80,000," describes Berry.

Increase Interest in Future Enrollment: By trying a different marketing approach, both Salem College and Keiger Direct were hopeful that their efforts would result in greater interest in the college from prospective students.

Engineer a Multichannel personalized URL Campaign: The campaign was to include an initial 6" x 9" postcard with a personalized URL, a personalized landing page with a short survey, then subsequent emails and mailings based on whether or not the survey was completed.

CREATIVE

With not much time to plan, the campaign for Salem College was kept simple.

Secure Quality Art & Video: They tapped a freelance designer named Carrie Leigh Dickey who had graduated from Salem and exclusively used her photography and designs for the postcards, the personalized URLs and e-mails. Meanwhile, their marketing firm planned to use, as an integral part of the campaign, a very professional and attractive trailer and five-minute video of Salem.

Deliver on Two Themes: On the initial 6" x 9" postcard, Salem used the first name of the prospect and then went with two themes – "[Name], how will you change tomorrow?" and simply "Shine." Subsequently, these themes were used throughout the rest of the campaign.

Push Them to the Site: On the reverse of the self-mailer, the top simply says "Visit" followed by the personalized URL. The copy below explains that they could view a trailer of Salem's new video that had just been finished or exclusive content.

Encourage Survey Participation: Besides the trailer, the web page includes a survey with three questions. In order to view the video in its entirety, the prospect is encouraged to fill out the survey, whereupon she is sent a password protective link and a "thank you" email from the site for the full five-minute video.

Utilize Variable Data for Copy & Images: After gathering the data from the personalized URL survey page, a variably printed eight-panel roll-fold self-mailer was sent out the following business day. Two panels were variable based from question number one (academic interest), and two images and a highlight-specific text panel were variable by ethnicity, with one panel featuring a current student's success story. Overall, there were 562 possible variations.

Encourage Spring Visits: Question three asked if the prospects wanted to arrange a spring visit to Salem. If they answered "yes," then a follow-up Spring Visit mailer was sent to them.

Have Something for Everyone: For the prospects who didn't fill out the survey but visited the site, they were sent a static brochure.

DEPLOYMENT AND RESULTS

The Drop: Over 80,000 self-mailers went out in two batches, February 3 and February 4. Salem got the names from the College Board – SAT scores had to be above a certain figure and because it's a women's college, all names were females. Sent to sophomores and juniors in high school, it went mostly to those in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia – but they also went to other states like Texas and Florida.

An Extra-Personal Thank-You Email: After filling out the survey, prospects received a variable thank you e-mail from the prospective counselor, including with their picture and contact information (it was divided up regionally between six counselors). If a prospect decided to attend Salem, she received a handwritten note from a counselor.

Deal with Non-Responders: Two non-response emails were sent, one two weeks after the invitational mailer dropped and the other nine weeks later. Also, a non-response mailer went out that was actually an extra mailing that was unused from the year before. On the latter, a personalized sticky note was affixed next to the personalized URL, saying, “[Name], check it out” with an arrow to the personalized URL.

A-plus Responses: The personalized URL was live for three months, with hits going through to the very last day. Responses were increased by 303 percent from the previous year. Spring visits were increased by 46 percent from the previous year. Kathy Barnes, associate dean of admissions at Salem, says, “The response rate in itself was amazing. I was very pleased with the seamlessness of the campaign – from postal to email to the connection to our video. Our marketing firm is...on the cutting edge of where the marketplace is heading.”

Much Greater Efficiency: “This was our first campaign using the MindFireInc software, as we'd done personalized URLs that we custom-coded ourselves. MindFireInc made it faster to put together, the variables automatically pulled in, the dashboard was easier to use, and it was faster to implement,” relates Berry, who adds that Salem's admissions staff was greatly freed up because they no longer had to frantically input data from BRE's and then send out follow-up mailers.

A Head Start on Next Year: This campaign generated a lot of relevant data that can be leveraged next year into the campaign.” We will be able to use the variables that we have and incorporate more [tactics], such as an offer,” concludes Berry.



View Salem's Portfolio page on our website to view images of the campaign, watch a step-by-step video, and read other case studies and articles about this campaign.

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For more information on the Salem Shines 09 Campaign or to find out how we can use MindFireInc to implement a cross-media campaign for you, please contact Leslie Berry at 336-760-0099 or lrberry@keiger.com