

There was no doubt about it. Circulation revenue was falling fast. The impact of a year of mismanagement by a previous publisher had taken its toll. Subscribers upset about everything from content changes to late delivery had cancelled their weekly paper. I had come into the newspaper confronted with a variety of challenges. Now it was time to tackle the issue of falling circulation.

Delivery and Format

We were a mail delivered newspaper so on-time delivery wasn't totally within our control. But there were some things we could do that would facilitate better delivery. First, we adjusted staffing levels and schedules so that all of the newspapers were labeled, bagged, and delivered to the local post office on time. Second, I worked with an expert in circulation to help determine what additional steps could be taken to facilitate reliable delivery. We worked with the local post office to ensure that labels met all specifications and that the bagging was done to standards. In addition, we worked with the local postmaster on correctly filling out all the needed forms and ensuring that we were getting all the discounts we were entitled to.



I also made some formatting tweaks. The masthead was redesigned for a more up-to-date look. We added full color into the press run on a regular basis. The editor made suggestions for providing content the readers were looking for. All in all, the formatting changes were well received and the paper was looking good.

The Circulation Drive

Once delivery and format issues were resolved, it was time to start building up the circulation base again. A strong circulation base would give us the readership we needed to drive strong advertising sales. Again, I had the help of a circulation expert. He suggested a number of different tactics we could use to help build and retain subscribers. We started with a circulation drive.

Given that we were a locally focused paper, we settled on a telemarketing program that would reach out to the local population. Together we put together a script that the staff could use to

talk with people and ask them to subscribe. We also put in a limited time offer that discounted the price of subscribing for those that renewed or subscribed right away.

Then it was time to train the staff and get the program rolling. Staff members were not enthusiastic in the beginning. No one likes getting telemarketing calls, and they weren't excited about being the ones doing the calling. However, after giving the program a shot most ended up actually enjoying making the calls. The script helped them to be relaxed about making sure everything was covered during the call, and they learned to just not worry about those that hung up or were rude.



As a follow up to the drive itself, we made changes to how renewals were handled. We implemented system changes that would generate renewal notices earlier and more frequently. The renewal program helped us to have a good chance of hanging onto the subscribers we'd worked so hard to sign up.

The Results

The program was a great success. The changes we made to ensure reliable delivery, improve format, and increase circulation paid off. The year of the circulation drive revenues from subscriptions increased by over 28 percent and we were able to hold onto many of those subscribers for years to come.

