



## HF Holidays gets in step with customers

**The UK's biggest name in walking and activity holidays uses new approaches in digital marketing and campaign optimisation provided by SAS® to drive growth**

The UK's largest walking and leisure activity holiday provider, HF Holidays has 50,000 customers each year including 35,000 guests in its 17 country house properties. A mutual society dating back to 1891, HF Holidays exists for the benefit of its members but also faces the same commercial pressures as any other holiday company - so it wants to reach and attract as many customers as possible in the most efficient and cost-effective ways. As a result, HF Holidays chose SAS® Marketing Automation and SAS® Digital Marketing to enable customer-centric marketing.

"This approach will enable us to use customer data more intelligently, to better understand customers and gain more insight into their behaviour," says Aimee Hart, Communications Manager, HF Holidays. "The opportunity is to convert customers in a quicker and easier way, with campaigns that are more accurate and targeted." HF Holidays is aiming to speed up its business growth by an additional five to ten percent in the next five years - with Ellion Insight a key partner supporting that growth.

### More effective campaigns

HF Holidays' main brochure mailing in October goes to two thirds of past bookers, with a follow-up mailing in January to enquirers in the last 12 months. "This is the time most tend to convert," says Hart. "We have another brochure mailing in June to 60,000 bookers; this presents our worldwide products that typically need a longer lead-in time." In addition, numerous sales letters and targeted communications are also mailed in the key sales period from January to March, with ad hoc follow-ups through the year. With e-newsletters, the business aims to send two or three targeted emails weekly using a database of 135,000 people, with at least one email a month sent to all.

Initial goals for the new approach were to build on current activity but in a far more efficient and targeted way, with new customer intelligence feeding into campaign selection and execution. "The old system only allowed us to pull booking history," she says. "By contrast, SAS means we pull three key data sources together: customer booking and reservations history, the membership database, and e-subscribers. We can communicate based on a better understanding of the customer. Before, we couldn't cross-reference across those separate systems." It was recognised that improved targeting and marketing efficiency would enable the business to operate more effectively, better control costs, improve response rates, reduce wastage and even have an environmental impact with fewer brochures printed and mailed.

### Why Ellion Insight?

HF Holidays had approached travel technology specialist and SAS partner [Ellion Insight](#) for support. Hart says, "We initially needed to import booking information into our e-newsletter system, and Ellion Insight recommended ways of integrating our data warehouse. This in turn meant replacing our old systems. They then provided various suggestions and with them, we identified SAS Marketing Automation as the best solution. None of the other systems could do everything we wanted – for example, predicting behaviour as well as reflecting on historic behaviour, and the ability to integrate our various data sources."

Once the Marketing Automation system had gone live the project was soon extended. "We wanted more sophisticated e-marketing, to improve targeting and personalisation," Hart says. "We believed SAS' ability to increase productivity while lowering operational costs, with more reliable and efficient delivery methods, would give us a lead in the marketplace." Implemented by Ellion Insight, the SAS platform – now including SAS Digital Marketing - went live in June 2009. Hart adds, "Ellion Insight understood fully what we wanted to achieve and was a very effective bridge translating our business requirements into a fully integrated SAS platform."



### **Improved targeting, less wastage**

“Using the old system we were emailing our subscribers without knowing if they’d booked with us before,” Hart continues. “Now, we email people that we know have opted-in, have made a previous booking, and we know if that booking is relevant to the holiday we are promoting in that particular email, walking or dancing, say. We expect to see an impact on response rates and conversion. We’re looking to see if certain people in our target audience convert better than others, which emails work and which don’t. Before, we knew someone had clicked through - but that was all. Now, we can track that back to an individual customer. And from a direct mail point of view we are looking to save on the costs and wastage involved in posting brochures and other literature.”

The system has brought advantages in other parts of the company too. For example, the sales team can track and analyse bookings and conversion rates to inform their activity. Meanwhile, product managers in the Penrith office can examine guest behaviour in terms of their choice of holiday and activity, when they booked, the time of year the holiday was taken, and so on, using these insights to plan future products. “These new approaches move us away from simply carrying on with what we did before and basing decisions on gut feeling,” Hart says. “Instead, you can plan based on hard facts. Our people didn’t have access to this kind of insight before.”

### **A faster, more intuitive approach**

With a detailed look at the ROI planned, once more campaigns had run benefits were evident straight away. “There are inherent time savings,” says Hart. “With the old system you could spend up to a day importing new data and we’d run data routines once a month; we were only getting new data in every month. Today, that happens overnight. We’ve got the latest figures every day.”

Hart says that when it comes to making selections for mailings and e-communications, the system is both highly intuitive and user friendly. “We have a five-year strategy that includes increasing membership and encouraging new target markets to book with us. Ellion Insight and the SAS software will help us design and offer the right products at the right time, and encourage the right people to look at them. We can learn from our experiences rather than simply doing things as they’ve been done before: we can see if things work, why, and make the changes required to provide a better result. We could do some of this before but it was very labour intensive and time consuming. SAS gives us the time and space to do our jobs - to do something with the knowledge we gain. We own 17 properties and want to fill them because, if we don’t, we’re not maximising the opportunity or delivering the best, social guest experience. We want to get people to book but we also want to understand why they decide not to, especially if they’ve booked before. SAS gives us an opportunity to analyse those areas, to go back and find out why

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