



## Case Study Series: What's Working in Marketing & Selling Professional Services

### How to Create and Execute an Email Campaign That Generates High Prospect Interest: Lessons from the RecruiterIQ Test

By Mary Flaherty

#### OVERVIEW

Bullhorn started out in 1999 as a job board for creative services for marketing professionals. But when the dotcom bubble burst, the company reinvented itself around front office software for staffing and recruiting firms. Since then, the software as a service (SaaS) provider established itself in the highly-competitive staffing industry. Brand recognition was high and customers were satisfied—saying they “live in Bullhorn.”

How to continue generating leads and engaging in conversations with prospects was the challenge facing the marketing department.

#### SITUATION

##### Once We Get Them to Try It, They're Hooked

Bullhorn's web-based front office software helped recruiters by incorporating collaboration (email, calendaring, scheduling, task management), customer relationship management, and applicant tracking and job management all in one place. With just one software program, staffing and recruitment firms could accomplish everything from sourcing candidates right through to placement—at a cost of \$135 per month per user.

Vice president of marketing Joe Cordo was confident that once prospective clients tried the software, they'd be hooked. “We're selling to entrepreneurs who happen to be sales people,” says Cordo, “So the biggest challenge is really being able to articulate the value of the software and how it can make a difference in their business.”

The company relied heavily on permission-based email marketing to supply leads for their sales effort and product trials. As a result, they maintained a healthy database of 36,000+ prospects. All their campaigns featured strong value-based offers. For example, they published a semi-annual compensation study which proved to be an extraordinarily popular offer.

“We use a number of offers following the traditional, permission-based marketing model: capturing interest, getting people to opt-in based on providing them something of value, and offering them something new and valuable so they become better acquainted with our brand over time,” says Cordo.

Developing value offers was an ongoing process and now he was looking for the next offer to rollout in a new campaign.

## **APPROACH**

### **Generate Excitement**

Cordo was looking for a new offer that would generate excitement and get people engaged in trying out the software. He had two primary objectives for the campaign:

1. Match or exceed prior successful campaigns in terms of open rates (mid-teens), click throughs (high-teens), and response (around 2%).
2. Try a new type of offer, one that could extend across all communication channels, not just email marketing.

“One of the biggest challenges is being able to get people to try the software and become engaged in thinking about the fact that technology can make a real strategic difference in their business. So any type of marketing campaign that can generate excitement to get people engaged in thinking about trying the software is very important.”

### **Know Your Customer**

Knowing their customer proved indispensable: continuing education was crucial with this group and the recruiting industry had several professional designations recruiters could attain. “Recruiters take a lot of pride in their knowledge; they take pride in the profession. They take pride in putting people to work,” says Cordo, “So education in this industry is extremely important.”

Building an offer around the theme of education was a natural fit: they developed RecruiterIQ™—patterned after similar online quizzes that test IQ or personality—to test recruiters’ industry knowledge.

### **Tap Into Experts**

With input from their advisory council—staffing and recruiting industry leaders—they created the test. Credibility was very important he says, “We want to make sure we’re giving people the best test possible.”

Technical development ate up most of the eight weeks it took to plan and execute the campaign: writing software to integrate the test with Bullhorn’s landing pages (which are integrated with Bullhorn’s own CRM system), etc.

The professionally copy-written email, with the subject line: What’s Your RecruiterIQ?, featured a clean HTML design and prominent button to click to “Take the Test” [see link to email below].

### **Go Where the Customer Is**

To achieve the objective of extending the offer across a variety of communications channels, Cordo and his team used an integrated approach, taking the following steps to promote the campaign:

1. Distributed press release to promote the test through PR Web
2. Sent eblast to their house list to announce the test
3. Developed a partnership with John Sumser, an industry influencer and writer of The Internet Biz Bugler website, and sponsored a seminar with him
4. Leveraged all promotions to drive people to the Bullhorn booth at trade shows to take the test and engage in conversation

Knowing their audience meant going online. "We go to where staffing and recruiting people live and much of where they live happens to be online," says Cordo. "These are people who are sitting at their desk all day and they're using two tools: the telephone and the computer. They're always on the Internet. So, our communications are always focused toward the Internet. We do virtually nothing in print."

### **Make It a Seamless Integration**

The online test was integrated with Bullhorn's marketing automation system and website allowing users to have a seamless experience. This was the process flow (which was transparent to users):

Prospect...

1. receives and opens email (sent from Bullhorn's marketing automation system, Vtrenz)
2. receives a link to the test registration form
3. fills out the form—a dynamic landing page—and clicks to submit
4. takes the test, clicks on submit
5. receives test results with calculated score
6. sees thank you page open which returns prospect to the Bullhorn site

## **RESULTS**

### **Generating Leads, Prospects, and Customers**

In terms of stats, the campaign was a success. Two weeks following the eblast, they had an email open rate of 17% and a 20% click-through rate—which was the same or slightly better than their most-successful past campaign. And, the response rate of 2.2% (people who registered and took the test) was slightly better than their best campaign. With that base of responses, Cordo expects 15% to become qualified leads—or about 120 viable new prospects for deals, and ultimately 40 to 50 new customers.

Cordo attributes some of the success to the fact that Bullhorn had already established a relationship with the community, "Many of those 36,000+ people had already gotten a lot of very credible research from Bullhorn. They had already seen reports on compensation, technology trends, tips on how to be a better recruiter, social networks, etc. So when they got this email about taking a recruiter IQ test, they knew it was going to add value. They didn't feel that this was frivolous or a piece of spam. They knew they'd learn something by taking the test."

### **Engaging in Conversations**

Beyond generating leads, the campaign encouraged prospects to remain engaged in conversation with the company. The Bullhorn sales team made follow-up calls to those who took the test and were encouraged by positive responses. According to Cordo, "The fact that the test itself was so different, people enjoyed taking it. It made it much easier for our sales people to have a conversation."

Looking ahead, Bullhorn plans to use more segmentation (by role, by size, by geography) and personalization as they continue to rollout the campaign with a series of tests over the course of the year. Next up: Test your social media IQ.

## Additional Insights Shared by Bullhorn

- **Successful execution requires commitment and resources.** This type of Web 2.0 campaign can't be successfully executed unless you have a commitment from the senior levels of the organization. Not only do you need to be web savvy, you need to be willing to commit resources to be able to execute on it.
- **Is your audience ready for it?** Before you execute something new and out-of-the-box—especially where it requires additional resources committed to it—you have to put it in the context of how your audience is going to receive it and what their perception of it is going to be. Ask yourself: *Are they ready for it?*
- **Include an extra incentive.** In addition to the take the test offer, excitement was added to the campaign with the extra incentive of a chance to win the popular Nintendo Wii system.
- **Communicate clearly with prospects regarding the follow-up call.** Cordo cautions, "It's important people realize they're going to get a call from you, if you plan to do that. A few people were surprised to get a call, so we're going to work on making that more clear next time."

## RESOURCES

- Bullhorn [<http://www.bullhorn.com/>] – company website
- Vtrenz [<http://www.vtrenz.com/>] - marketing automation system
- John Sumser [<http://www.johnsumser.com/>] [<http://www.interbiznet.com/>] - industry influencer and seminar partner
- Starr Tin Cup [<http://www.starrtincup.com/>] – agency that wrote the copy and HTML
- PR Web [<http://www.prweb.com/>] – the online service used to distribute the press release
- [[link to creative sample – the email](#)]