

Spring-Green Lawn Care: Using Technology To Deliver Customized Local Marketing



FRANCHISE UPDATE

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James Young, president of Spring-Green Lawn Care, describes his approach to marketing as tactical, because it "allows our franchise owners to do what they do well," he says. "I can't go out and make lawns green and provide good customer service. What I can do is drive market growth and help build franchise revenues based on what matters in each local market."

He's doing that by being a pioneer in using technology - not only to reach customers, but also to allow them to respond to customized offers (online, by phone, or by mail) with a promotion code Spring-Green uses to measure the effectiveness and ROI of a campaign. "We were the first lawn care company to offer a buy online option through our website that integrated with a unique code given in our direct mail program," says Young.

Strategic implementation of customized, personalized promotions allows Spring-Green to reap the benefits of a unique combination: economies of scale with a personalized, local touch. Corporate handles all printing and distribution of direct mail, and a centralized call center responds to all inbound calls, but every campaign is customized for the local franchisee, complete with specific offers tailored to individual households. Variable data includes each customer's home and lawn size, as well as other demographic information about them. This allows Spring-Green to include a price estimate for each household in the direct mailing, eliminating the need for an initial consultation visit by the franchisee - and allowing the homeowner to respond immediately.

"We group our printing together to offset costs, but we have the flexibility to change the offer and image as we go, based on data from the franchise owners," Young says. "Our lawn care programs are going to be different for each franchise owner, and those differences have to be put together in the proposal for the customer."

When customers call a local number in response to a campaign, a member of Spring-Green's centralized call center staff answers. "We don't take messages, we make the sale," Young says. "And we know how many calls come in for each franchise owner, based on the promotional code."

Everything is measured and evaluated to continually fine-tune the company's marketing effort: list performance, cost per sale, cost per click, conversion rates, and much more - and communicated to franchisees, as well as management. "As sales come in, the data is tagged with how and why a particular offer was selected. We can present franchise owners with the data and explain what it means in a digestible format, so they know how to reinvest for next year," Young says.

"You can lay out all of the tools and say to the franchise owners, 'Here are the promotions and ads. Run them as you see fit.' But we are tactically involved, so that our franchise owners can focus on service and grow their business."

The success of Young's approach to direct marketing is seen in Spring-Green's consistent growth in recent years. "Taking into account the recession, we have continued to expand our independent franchise network, which speaks volumes," he says. "We are a proven success in a down economy. I'd like to see how far we can stretch our legs, and how well we'd do in an up economy."