

A PRIMEDIA Publication

Free Product Info

FEATURED CONTENT

Campaigns
Opinions/Columns

B-to-B News/Stories
Catalog/Retail
Financial Services
Publishing
Travel/Entertainment

Legal/Regulatory
Postal

Direct Mail
E-mail
Web Marketing
Telemarketing
CRM/DB
DR Media
Data/List Business

RELATED LINKS

Catalog Age
Ops & Fulfillment
Promo
American
Demographics
Circulation
Management
Folio
Media Central
SEM

OTHER DIRECT MARKETING LINKS

DMA
USPS

RESOURCES

Archives
About DIRECT
Contact the Staff

Park Surveyors

BY RICHARD H. LEVEY

Direct, Dec 1, 2003

Nearly 1 million amusement park customers agree: They want Tom Cruise, SpongeBob SquarePants and the occasional free hot dog if they're going to keep returning to regional sites.

How does Paramount Parks, a regional park operator, know this? It collected surveys that revealed it.

Regional attractions, such as the eight locations run by Paramount Parks, use customer feedback to keep their locations fresh. They pull visitors from a 250-mile radius (unlike Disney, which can attract cross-border travelers), and rely on these people making several trips a year to be successful.

The challenge for corporate director of research Mark Kupferman is keeping the various Paramount Parks exciting, either through new rides and attractions, or marketing programs designed with individual preferences in mind. The Charlotte, NC company has stepped up customer feedback activities by using Inquisite, an online survey tool which shares its name with the Austin-based firm that developed it.

While the parks use on-site surveys administered by employees, most questionnaires are filled out at the customer's home. Visitors are presented with a card asking them to complete the questionnaires online and enter to win free passes.

In doing so, they contribute their e-mail addresses to Paramount's customer database, and can opt in to receive further information and participate in other surveys.

Kupferman isn't worried that he's skewing his sample to more affluent, educated consumers by depending on e-mail and online surveys. But he is aware of it, and will weight the responses based on age information. That said, his two major demographic groups are teenagers and parents with kids — all big Internet users.

The data has helped craft some direct marketing programs, most notably pricing strategies aimed at season ticket holders. Paramount Parks also will target promotions such as free lunches with admission to segments it feels will respond most strongly.

Paramount's ride development departments make free use of the marketing database's findings as well. Because the firm is owned by Viacom, each location is able to tie new rides in with other Viacom properties such as Nickelodeon and Paramount Pictures movies. New ride themes often are generated from customer suggestions.

It's actually no trick to get amusement park customers to talk about attractions, Kupferman says: Completion rates on surveys about rides can top out at 90%, as opposed to the less glamorous surveys on food and hospitality, which might be ignored by one out of four recipients.