State Wildlife Agency Tool Kit for Hunting Recruitment and Retention

Project funded from NSSF’s Hunting Heritage Trust Grant Program 2019/2020

Introduction

This is the final report on the pilot project: Tool Kit for Hunting Recruitment and Retention, funded by a Hunting Heritage Grant from the National Shooting Sports Foundation. The project focused on two state fish and wildlife agencies to utilize targeted electronic marketing to increase the percentage of hunter education graduates that purchase a hunting license. The Toolkit project involved three phases:

1- Creation of a landing page within the state agency’s webpage where a suite of items are housed that are useful to hunters, filling the following five needs: Where to go, How to hunt, What you need to hunt, What to do with game meat? Licenses and rules etc.
2- Drive traffic to the landing page using email and supplemented by social media.
3- Measure the impact of license sales in comparison to the previous year’s data; specifically, the rate of license purchases among hunter education graduates. Utilize this information to improve on the marketing plan in subsequent years.

States Selected

The two state agencies that agreed to implement the pilots are the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. In Iowa, the pilot focused on their pheasant hunting season, and in Tennessee the focus was on deer gun season.

Project Contacts:

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Iowa

Iowa’s landing page can be found at www.iowadnr.gov/HuntIA. Going forward Iowa would like to reorder the items on the landing page to prioritize “How to Hunt” and “Where to Hunt” resources to the areas of the page where viewers’ eyes are most likely to go first.

Iowa’s landing page
Iowa sent two emails, the first on October 3\textsuperscript{rd} to 11,728 hunter education graduates from 2018. The second email was sent on December 31\textsuperscript{st} to 11,531 people.

\textbf{Iowa's first email 10/3/19}

Congratulations Hunter Education Graduate! Check out this brand new resource website, designed just for new hunters like you.

Having trouble viewing this email? View it as a Web page.

\begin{center}
\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{stay_on_target_beyond_hunter_education.png}
\end{figure}
\end{center}

\textbf{Experience the Rush of the Flush!}

Congratulations Hunter Education Graduate!

Now that you've completed hunter education, we want to make sure you have all the tools you need to make your future hunts a success. Click \texttt{http://www.invedtr.northhunting} to check out the Iowa Department of Natural Resource's brand new website, designed just for new hunters like you. It has everything you need to prepare and experience a safe and successful upland bird hunt including the following information:

- What you need to know before you go - licenses, laws, season dates, times, etc.
- Pheasant/quail biology, habitat and history
- Where to hunt and/or shoot
- Pheasant hunting methods and safety
- Field dressing and cooking
- Digital Mentor Network - ask questions to knowledgeable staff and volunteers from your mobile device.
- Upcoming learn to hunt and mentored hunt opportunities (youth & adults)
- Special retail/discount offers just for hunter education graduates
- How to get involved - Pheasants Forever, become a digital mentor, etc.

We hope your first hunting experiences will be enjoyable, safe and provide memories that will last a lifetime!

Website
Start a New Outdoor Tradition in 2020 - Try Pheasant Hunting!

Start a new outdoor tradition with your family and friends in 2020 - try pheasant hunting!

Never experienced the rush of the flush? Or just need to further develop your knowledge and skills chasing these wild, Iowa birds? Check out our website that contains everything you need to prepare and experience a safe and successful upland bird hunt.

Information on the website includes:

- What you need to know before you go - licenses, laws, season dates, times, etc.
- Pheasant/quail biology, habitat and history
- Where to hunt and/or shoot
- Pheasant hunting methods and safety
- Field dressing and cooking
- Digital Mentor Network - ask questions to knowledgeable staff and volunteers from your mobile device.
- Upcoming learn to hunt and mentored hunt opportunities
- Special retail/discount offers just for hunter education graduates
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We hope your first hunting experiences will be enjoyable, safe and provide memories that will last a lifetime!

Website
**Iowa Measurements**

The first email had an open rate of 55% and a click rate to the landing page of 12%. The second email had an open rate of 33% with an open rate of 11%. Both emails far exceeded normal averages for email solicitations of this type. Overall, there were more than 1,300 visits to the landing page, with 698 of them being first time visitors. During the project, the Iowa DNR completely overhauled their license system. It was projected that it would be in place by the end of the project to facilitate the comparison between 2019 and previous years. Unfortunately, the system was not fully operational until January which prevented the comparison. Overall, the Iowa staff feels strongly that they learned a lot from the pilot and are hopeful to work on the next phase with the Sportsmen’s Alliance and National Shooting Sports Foundation to improve using the lessons learned.

“I see great benefits of a targeted email outreach effort to our recent hunter education graduates. We know through both national and local research that the common barriers of not going on to participate in hunting typically stem back to simply not knowing where to go, not knowing what the necessary gear/equipment is to participate, and not having someone to go with. Through our recent efforts in partnership with NSSF and SA, we have been able to create a landing page full of resources new hunters want and need. We have seen great success in regard to our open and click through rates in last fall’s campaign.

*Current National Averages for Government Emails: 28.77% open rate / 3.99% click through rate*

With achieving a 55% and 33% open rate and 12% and 11% click thru rate respectively in our two emails, it proves we were spot on with our target audience (recent hunter education graduates) and that we were providing them with information they were interested in. We look forward to partnering with NSSF and SA on this effort again on 2020!”

**Megan Wisecup, Iowa DNR**
Tennessee

Where Iowa utilized mostly in-state resources for its toolkit, Tennessee pulled from a broad range of sources, including NSSF’s Where to Hunt resources, the International Hunter Education Association, National Bowhunter Education Foundation and more to build its page.

The landing page can be found at https://www.tn.gov/twra/hunting/hunter-education/deer-hunting-guide.html?utm_campaign=hunteredgrad&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

Tennessee’s landing page

The original intent was to launch the campaign the first week of November, coinciding with the bulk of state’s deer gun season. However, a reorganization of staff within the agency delayed the creation of the website for several weeks. The promotional email was sent on January 3rd. To compensate for a smaller potential audience, Tennessee targeted all Hunter Education Graduates from the previous three years who had not purchased a license, and current hunter education graduates. The promotion reached 22,347 people.
Getting the Most Out of Your Hunt!

Congratulations on being a Hunter Education Graduate!

Since you've completed hunter education, we want to make sure you have all the tools you need to help you hunt with success. Check out the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency’s brand new webpage. It has everything you need to prepare and experience a safe and successful deer hunt including the following information:

- What you need to know before you go - licenses, laws, season dates, times, etc.
- Where to hunt and/or shoot
- Tips on scouting for deer
- Setting up tree stands and tree stand safety
- Sighting in your rifle for hunting season
- The importance of scent control
- Field dressing and cooking
- And more…

If you would like to come to a program to learn to hunt or shoot, apply for the Hunting and Fishing Academy today!

We hope your hunting experiences will be enjoyable, safe and provide memories that will last a lifetime!
**Tennessee Measurements**

The email had a 29% open rate with 3% of recipients clicking through to the landing page, a smaller rate likely attributable to the timing of the email which was during the final weeks of Tennessee’s deer gun season which lasts several months. However, TWRA reported that the email produced 116 financial transactions, suggesting that although the click rate was lower, many of those utilizing the tool kit were purchasing a license. Ultimately Tennessee did not feel it was useful to pull the data from previous years to evaluate the success of the pilot since the timing greatly reduced its potential. But the agency was extremely pleased with the transactions and the open rate. They received positive feedback on the landing page and are very hopeful to work with the Sportsmen’s Alliance and NSSF again to do a second phase of the project.

“We used the toolkit and will continue doing so. Unfortunately, due to some internal issues, we did not get to use it to its fullest potential regarding timing around hunting season. We did see good engagement with the content even though it was used at the end of deer season.

Next year, we’re planning to use the toolkit concept again in a way that will be much more effective. We have the landing pages built now and they continue to get engagement. We envision emailing hunter ed grads in a more timely way before the season to be more effective. The transactions from this project suggest we will see an increase in the percentage of hunter education graduates who ultimately purchase a license. We look forward to working with the Sportsmen’s Alliance and National Shooting Sports Foundation to design and implement a successful follow-up to our work this year.”

Jennifer Wisniewski, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency

**Project Summary**

There is little doubt that both state agencies learned new tools that will be useful in their overall R3 efforts and the pursuit of their targets, hunter education graduates. While there were some unanticipated hiccups in the project, both states saw results that have convinced their agencies that the tool kit concept is worth exploring further.

The Sportsmen’s Alliance is grateful for their partnership on this project, and greatly appreciative for the Hunting Heritage Partnership Grant that made it possible. We look forward to working with NSSF to improve upon what has been learned during this successful pilot project.