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Ruth's Chris Steak House sends sizzling e-mails for special occasions

By Dianna Dilworth

Using the Endai Worldwide platform for targeted e-mails [MessageTraq® Email Marketing], Ruth's Chris Steak House claims to have registered open rates as high as 85 percent.

Geoffrey Stiles, the chief operating officer at Ruth's Chris in Heathrow, FL, said the trick to a good e-mail program is to appreciate the support of customers who opt-in and not abuse their trust.

"E-mail is somewhat of an intrusive tool, and I'm not comfortable with superfluous e-mail that does not have a call-to-action," Mr. Stiles said. "But we contact our guests on a very controlled basis for significant reminders of value."

These value-add e-mails include content such as birthday and anniversary reservation reminders, which is akin to a favor to regular patrons since getting reservations at the restaurant chain at certain times can be challenging.

Other e-mails, Mr. Stiles said, include the introduction of new products and wine recommendations, both of which are targeted to a customer's history of likes and dislikes.

For example, an e-mail for a new cabernet that a sommelier at a local branch of the restaurant recommends will be sent to customers who have expressed interest in red wine and who live in the area. An e-mail about a limited venison available on the menu will be sent to patrons in the area who like different meats.

"When you follow the basic rules and best practices and keep the mail relevant [and] make sure it's anticipated and ac-

tually offers value, e-mail can be an excellent marketing channel," said Mike Ferranti, CEO of Endai, New York.

The steak house sends out e-mails about 13 times a year to keep the dialogue going. It claims a 1,000 percent return on investment through the channel. Many of the e-mail names are gathered from

customers who make reservations online at www.ruthschris.com, but some are also collected in the restaurant.

Thirty-five percent of the names come are from the pre-Web site list that are given the option to opt-in through phone calls or mailers.

The restaurant is targeting affluent consumers and has co-registration partnerships with firms like Morning Star Mutual, where consumers signing up for mutual funds are given the option to opt-in for savory Ruth Chris e-mails.

Other online marketing efforts that are powered by Endai (www.endai.com) include search and banner ads. Offline marketing efforts include radio ads at

both the national and local level, as well as print at the local level.

Mr. Stiles said even though the brand is a national chain, each store boasts its own community, so advertising at the local level is key.

"Community relationships are important to our business," he said. "We often partner with local charities or groups like golfers. We find that golfers tend to appreciate a good steak and a nice wine, and partnering up with golfers gives us higher visibility in the community."

Geoff Stiles is the COO of the Orlando based Ruth's Chris Steak House (NASDAQ: RUTH). He oversees all operations and company over 100 prime steak house restaurants in the Ruth's Chris chain. Ruth's Chris accepts online reservations at www.ruthschris.com.

Ferranti is the CEO and Founder at New York based online marketing technology and services firm Endai Worldwide, whose e-mail technology clients include CitiFinancial, Laplink Software, Provident Bank, Columbia FCU, LoanWeb.com. Endai is the interactive agency of record, and e-mail service provider for Ruth's Chris. Contact Ferranti at 212.405.1881 or online at messagetraq.endai.com



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