

Delta Queen's Database Gains Steam

By Melissa Campanelli

Delta Queen Steamboat Co. Inc. was known for its large, loyal guest database. At one point the database had information on 6 million people who liked to ride on the authentic paddlewheel riverboats.

But after several ventures and expansions, its owner went bankrupt and much of the data disappeared from 2000 to 2002.

"The files, tapes and information were just lost," said Butler Burdine, an account supervisor at Peter A. Mayer Advertising Inc. in New Orleans, Delta Queen's marketing partner. "We were left with about 3 million names as a mail-out file only, with names and addresses only. There was no data on those past guests."

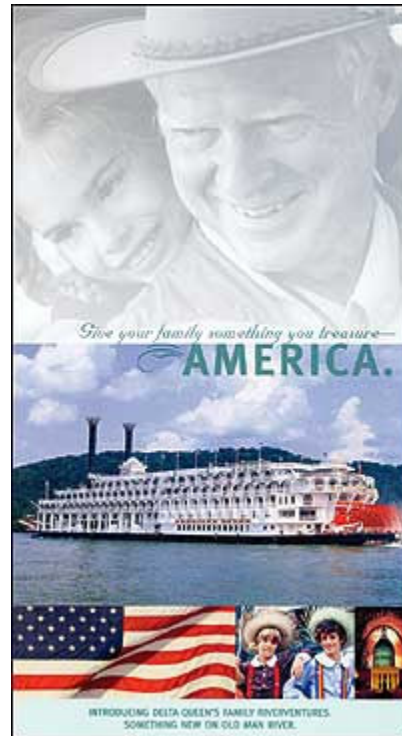
But in 2002, Delta Queen became a wholly owned subsidiary of Delaware North Companies Inc., a Buffalo, NY, provider of hospitality and food service management. The company also uncovered some data that let it start rebuilding its data warehouse.

"We found an old reservation file on some tapes in a box in the back of a closet, and we started resurrecting what we could," said Mary Pax, manager of marketing services at Delta Queen.

The file contained information on Delta Queen's travelers from about 2001, including names, addresses, phone numbers, what they purchased, the offers made and their type of cabin or stateroom. Delta Queen offers themed steamboat river cruises in three riverboats: the Delta Queen, American Queen and Mississippi Queen.

Meanwhile, the company was generating new names and prospects via an aggressive image and branding and inquiry campaign.

"We would run advertising and generate response or interest in our product, and then we sent responses to people, so we were getting prospect names and addresses," Burdine said.



The company also bought names based on parameters of past guests: basically, seniors with \$50,000-plus household income and certain lifestyle characteristics.

In 2004, the company wanted to improve and expand its database. Ruf Strategic Solutions, Olathe, KS, which delivers tourism intelligence solutions, created a data warehouse by the end of 2004.

Delta Queen now has 300,000 past-guest households identified and 1.6 million prospects. Prospect data include name and address. Past-guest data include name and address along with what they bought, how many times they cruised with the company and how far in advance they booked.

Data are collected via a call center and reservation department; from inquires from magazine or newspaper ads; or direct mail

programs. And data are captured on board. For example, the company has a past-guest reception, where these guests fill out forms about their history with Delta Queen.

Delta Queen also has 55,000 e-mail addresses and plans its first consumer-based e-mail campaign later this year and into 2006.

The company recently launched two loyalty programs -- Ambassador and Members Only -- in part to gather even more data about guests.

Ruf recently helped Delta Queen market to a new niche: grandparents and their children and grandchildren. The company traditionally marketed to a more mature audience, but in recent years it recognized that more young people were on the riverboats. It created a package called Delta Queen Family Riverventures. In March, Delta Queen mailed 500,000 direct mail pieces promoting the program in the June-August period to a targeted list of people.

"We asked Ruf to identify those grandparents that had a high propensity to travel in the cruise industry and who also had the possibility of doing multigeneration travel," said Rebecca Fuglar, database marketing manager at Peter A. Mayer. "It was a targeted direct mail piece that had a family influence on it. You see the grandparents and the children together."

Ruf profiled the past-guest and prospect database with its Smart Cluster system, a homogeneous group of households statistically combined by their similarity of demographics and psychographics. Fuglar said response was phenomenal.

"We had an 8-to-1 return on investment and over 935 bookings," she said. The offer had a unique 800 number and an offer code.

Delta Queen plans another Riverventures promotional campaign in early 2006.

Melissa Campanelli covers postal news, CRM and database marketing for DM News and DMNews.com. To keep up with the latest developments in these areas, subscribe to our daily and weekly e-mail newsletters by visiting www.dmnews.com/newsletters