



## Getting To Know You

Wendy Atkin-Smith,

Managing Director of Viking River Cruises explains how getting to know her customers has opened the brand to a wider audience and increased returns.

Established in 2006, Viking River Cruises operates the **world's largest and leading fleet of deluxe vessels** built specifically for river travel. With its fleet plying the waterways of Europe, Russia, Ukraine and China, Viking has welcomed more than half a million people on magical, enlightening journeys through these exciting places.

With a host of accolades to their name, Viking River Cruises has consistently scored highly in competitive rankings such as Condé Nast Traveller's Gold List, the Reader's Choice and Best Small Ships awards; and Travel + Leisure's World's Best. The company's high standards have been awarded and honoured across the travel industry and by international organisations like the World Travel Awards. Viking River Cruises has also won several awards including TravelAge West's Best Line for River Cruising, Travel Weekly's #1 River Cruise Line and featuring in National Geographic's 'The 10 Best of Everything.'

While cheaper cruises are available on the market, our standards of excellence, sumptuous custom built vessels and attention to detail are what sets us apart from the rest. Because our river boats have a smaller capacity and offer a totally different experience to large ocean cruise liners, our holiday costs can appear high if you don't understand what's included and our market is quite niche.

Ultimately, we want our customers to have an unparalleled experience that they will remember forever, encouraging repeat bookings, achieving higher rankings on travel forums and positive word of mouth.

In order to offset our running costs, preserve our ticket prices and maintain the highest possible standard of service, it's imperative that our sales consultants receive a steady stream of incoming bookings.



## Creating valuable relationships

We used REaD Group's data to profile our database, which was comprised of approximately 10,000 customers and enquirers, examining it in minute detail to see who our customers actually were.

### Objectives:

When we first launched the brand we used print advertising to market our cruises in the travel sections of broad sheet newspapers and other publications, which reflected our brand values and targeted the type of customers that would be interested in our river cruises. While this achieved a steady flow of bookings during our first two years, we were still relatively unknown. As a luxury high ticket brand, we trade on our name so in order to get it out there we ramped up our marketing efforts and decided to try Direct Marketing.

We rolled out a targeted direct mail campaign to consumers that seemed to match what we thought was our market. While the creative was wonderful and reflected our brand values there was little return on our investment and we struggled to work out what went wrong.

If it wasn't the creative, it must be something else. We realised we needed to take a closer look at our customers to get to know them better and see if there was a way of targeting similar clientele more effectively. We were recommended to look at data from REaD Group by our existing data and analysis consultant.

In many ways our first discussion was a revelation, who knew data could yield so much? What we learned was that if it isn't accurate or up to date, or if the analysis behind the dataset isn't thorough or segmented properly, then even the most attractive DM campaign isn't going to convert.

### Approach:

We used REaD Group's data to profile our database, which was comprised of approximately 10,000 customers and enquirers, examining it in minute detail to see who our customers actually were. Once we had gained an understanding of our customer's preferred booking channel and how they wanted to engage, the data was analysed to see how our customers and enquirers engage with us online through our website.

Although we previously thought that our market was broadly affluent and age biased, we discovered we had three very different types of customer, all of whom needed to be targeted in different ways. For example, our customers are now segmented according to different age groupings so it's obvious which type of offering might appeal to them. After appending email addresses to our existing database, REaD Group helped develop a prospect, 'like for like' email database and we began emailing regular communications to 500,000 consumers.



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After a year of steady brand building, our enquirer database grew exponentially and as a consequence of the regular mailings, our brand became better known and our bookings shot up.

### Results:

Now, our frequent segmentation and scoring models enable us to track our customers and their booking patterns, which are constantly changing and we are able to see the different types of customers that are becoming interested in our river cruises. And, because we have increased awareness of the brand, we have opened up wider opportunities in markets we had previously not considered.

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**Getting to know our customers so well has paid dividends. We now have time to concentrate our efforts on ensuring our fleet of vessels are a cut above the rest and continue to offer experiences that are unforgettable.**