

From Filler to Funnel: How I Turned Overlooked Content into a Scalable Customer Acquisition Strategy -- Case Study

Executive Summary

At Guideposts, I transformed themed recipes – considered email “filler” content - into a powerful lead-generation magnet as part of a broader digital marketing strategy tasked with driving the sales of new book series. By repurposing these high-engagement recipes as strategic lead magnets within a multi-touch marketing funnel, I increased email acquisition by 325% while cutting acquisition costs by 50%. This approach became a key component in our digital transformation, which ultimately generated \$1.8M in profit from our \$2M advertising investment—a 90% return on ad spend (ROAS). This case study highlights how recognizing the potential in overlooked content created a replicable model that repositioned content as a core growth asset.

Who Are They?

Guideposts is a nonprofit publisher with a mission to help people achieve their highest spiritual and personal potential. Founded in 1945 by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, the organization has a rich legacy in publishing magazines, devotional books, and cozy fiction. Guideposts sells direct-to-consumer, with a legacy audience and a house list of nearly 1 million names.

Starting Point

- Traditionally, Guideposts relied on direct mail as its primary book launch strategy.
- However, with the rise of digital platforms and a need to modernize their approach, the company began shifting toward a digital-first model.
- I was brought in to lead this transition and manage the digital agencies executing paid campaigns to support book launches.

The Problem

- Digital advertising campaigns launched by the agency in tandem with book releases were successful, however, without prior digital advertising expertise management at Guideposts was unaware of the need to challenge the agency in order to optimize campaign strategy for improved outcomes.
- Moreover, Guideposts was also contending with an aging customer base (primarily 80+ y/o), making customer acquisition and expanding reach to new, younger audiences a pressing concern.

The Solution

- While collaborating with brand managers and creative teams, I noticed that email newsletters featuring recipes connected to the themes or settings of book series -- historically treated as filler content - had exceptionally high open rates.
- Recognizing this as an opportunity to repurpose recipes as a lead magnet in a multi-touch marketing funnel, I devised a strategy that would both acquire new emails and build a pipeline of customers over an extended pre-launch period.
- This approach involved:
 - Recipe downloads offered via Facebook ads, followed up with a dedicated drip email campaign offering a timed discount and automatic enrollment in a bi-weekly nurturing e-newsletter.
 - Facebook retargeting ads with campaigns targeted to drive discount redemption, or to build a content bridge to book shipment dates depending on prospect action.
 - 2 discount redemption reminders via e-newsletter prior to discount expiration and early announcements of future new releases.
 - Developing performance KPI's to assess email, conversion and Facebook ads cost and performance vs prior launch campaigns.

Results

- **Recipe ebook downloads totaled 9,584**, with 8,701 (91%) representing new customer acquisitions compared to 2,800 new names in previous campaigns—a **325% increase** in new customer acquisition.
- **Cost per name acquisition dropped to \$0.21 versus \$0.34** for previous content downloads—a near **50% cost reduction**.
- **Email engagement metrics significantly outperformed standard campaigns**, with open rates of 22% (vs. 14% average) and click-through rates of 7.8% (vs. 5.5% average).
- The recipe-based funnel maintained a healthy list with only 3.2% of new names opting out, demonstrating strong audience alignment.
- Facebook retargeting reached approximately 35% of the download cohort with high frequency, though with room for optimization.

Client Impact

- The success demonstrated that with a properly constructed marketing funnel, digital advertising could achieve multiple growth outcomes for the business.
- This outcome helped shift the internal mindset toward **treating content as a growth asset**, not just as engagement collateral.
- Most importantly, it provided a replicable model for **building a pre-launch customer pipeline**, which could be used across future book series and adapted for other product categories.