

The Washington Post's Perfect "10"

On Dec. 6, 1881, Stilson Hutchins launched his "Democratic daily journal," which he named *The Washington Post*. Volume 1, Number 1 was four pages on rag paper. It cost 3 cents, had a circulation of 10,000, and reporters traveled about by foot, hack, horse and buggy, and highwheeled bicycle. The newspaper type was hand-set from the longhand copy of reporters and editors.

Over the last 123 years, *The Post* has grown into one of the most recognized news organizations in the world, covering local, national, and international news and features, as well as the worlds of sports, finance and entertainment.

Today, the typewriter has given way to a computer network that enables reporters and editors to electronically prepare stories for publication. Working around the clock, seven days a week, nearly 1,000 people in the production department take these stories, along with classified and display advertising, and turn them into *The Washington Post*.

By September 2003, *The Post's* Sunday circulation was just over 1 million, and Monday through Saturday averaged 700,000 to 750,000 readers. Also in 2003, a new section targeting 18- to 34-year olds, the Sunday Source, was launched as part of an effort to increase readership among younger audiences. This tips off the biggest problem facing *The Post* and many other traditional newspapers: how to attract younger readers.

The Problem

In general, print circulations are falling, and larger publishers are suffering the biggest declines. There is a lot of competition for readers these days. In the old days, newspapers just had to compete with other newspapers. Now, the competition has expanded to in-

and read print newspapers. How do you attract a young graduate who is used to doing research and getting information online? A young grad who didn't grow up reading the Sunday paper as a weekend ritual? How do you draw him in and make him a weekly, or better yet daily, reader?

The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20071

PRESORTED STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
0.00

The Washington Post

10 FOR \$10 SAVINGS FORM

Publication	Term	Subscription	Standard Rate	Courtesy Rate	YOU SAVE
<input type="checkbox"/> The Washington Post	10 weeks	Sunday Only	\$17.00	\$10.00	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> The Washington Post	10 weeks	7 Days	\$36.00	\$20.00	44%

Please bill me. Please bill my credit card: AmEx VISA MC

ACCOUNT # _____ EXP. DATE _____
SIGNATURE _____
HOME PHONE _____
WORK PHONE _____
EMAIL _____

Check here if you would like to receive a study from The Washington Post Company.

Valid within The Washington Post's 7-day home-delivery area only. For site operators and those who have not subscribed to The Post for the past 30 days. Offer not valid in Richmond or Washington, VA, and your account will be billed for the remaining home-delivery area as it would from within the Post. If paying by credit card, a charge from The Washington Post will appear on your credit card statement every 4 weeks. This offer cannot be combined with any other Post home-delivery offer. Offer expires April 24, 2005. © 2005, The Washington Post.

RP10

Act Now to Get 10 Sundays for only \$10

For a limited time, you can get 10 weeks of Sunday home delivery of *The Washington Post* for just \$10. You'll save 33% off standard home delivery rates, but you must subscribe today to take advantage of this fantastic offer.

Every Sunday, you'll enjoy waking up to:

- TV Week & Parade
- Classifieds & Jobs
- Sunday Source
- The Car Pages
- Travel
- Up to \$130 a week in coupons
- *The Washington Post Magazine*
- Sports
- 2 big color comics sections

And so much more...

HURRY! This 10 for \$10 offer is only available for a limited time. Start your preferred rate subscription to *The Washington Post* today and experience firsthand the convenience of home delivery.

Get 10 Sundays for \$10

REPLY BY
APRIL 24, 2005

For faster service call 1-800-873-0182, Ext. 1, or visit www.washingtonpost.com/subscribe

Like many publishers, The Washington Post has found success with a voucher control that focuses on a proven offer and ease of response. Its performance in the mail combined with its low production costs give this package a killer ROI that other efforts just haven't been able to top.

clude free papers, free information available on the Internet, online paid media and "condensed" information sources like newsletters.

The biggest problem, of course, is attracting "younger people" to buy

By **DON MAHONEY**

In short, the biggest challenge facing *The Post* is the same age-old challenge that every direct mailer comes up against: How do you sell the product?

That's where the team from Bethesda, Md.-based Silver Marketing, led by President Pat Silver and Vice President Katherine Carr, came in. Asked to create a new marketing piece for *The Post*,

they had their hands full.

Simply stated, their challenge was to create for *The Post* a winning promotion in a very saturated, widespread market, directed at people who don't have a lot of time.

The Solution

One thing that *The Post* and Silver Marketing had going for them was that the target audience is very familiar with the product, so the promotion didn't need to spend a lot of time explaining what the product is.

They started the process by conducting extensive research into *The Post's* subscribers and what key benefits the publication offers to its readers. They also did extensive list research and provided list selection to *The Post*.

After studying earlier controls and the subscriber base, Silver Marketing created a voucher package, copywritten by Carr, that sells a short term of Sunday deliveries at an attractive price.

Selling 10 weeks of Sunday service for \$10, it's become known as the "10 for \$10" package. Mailed for the first time in December of 2003, this voucher package quickly became the control, and has been mailed and remailed approximately eight or nine times since, with mailings running from 1 million to 1.5 million pieces. Follow-up mailings seek to convert these 10-for-\$10 customers to daily and full, 52-week subscribers. Because of client confidentiality, Silver Marketing cannot reveal the actual statistics, but it can say that the 10-for-\$10 package performs "very well."

Dissecting the Control

The 10-for-\$10 voucher package is designed to look more or less like a bill. It comes in a plain, white #10 window envelope that bears only *The Post's* return address. Inside is an 8½" x 6½" "10 for \$10 Savings Form." The top half of the perforated sheet focuses on the offer: 10 weeks of Sunday-only service for \$10—a savings of 33 percent off the newsstand price—or 10 weeks of seven-day delivery for \$20—a savings of 44 percent. The bottom half of the sheet reiterates the offer; urges fast response with a reply-by date and copy stressing that this is a limited time offer; offers a phone number and

URL as additional response channels; and uses a simple, bulleted list to highlight the key benefits of the newspaper:

Every Sunday, you'll enjoy waking up to:

- TV Week and Parade
- Classifieds & Jobs
- Sunday Source
- The Car Pages
- Travel ...

According to Carr, that the voucher serves a dual role really is the key to the package's success. "The control can appeal to different people because there's a chart across the top, where visually you can just see the savings, [while] the bottom part of the voucher highlights the benefits of the product," explains Carr. "Some people like to read and some people are visual, and this captures both quickly."

The only other component of the package is a BRE; that, combined with the personalization on the voucher form and the soft, "Please bill me" option makes responding to this offer as quick and simple as can be. This ease of response is a huge benefit of a voucher package, asserts Carr.

But the real star of this voucher package is the offer itself. The catchy, 10-for-\$10 offer has proven to be just the right mix for *The Post*. While five weeks for \$5 would have too little return to be cost-effective, and the high price point of a full-year subscription would have to contend with consumer resistance, this offer uses an attractive price to get a prospect to sign on for just long enough to make *The Sunday Post* a weekly habit and hopefully convert him into a dedicated reader. According to Carr, even as *The Post* tests different formats, this offer won't be going anywhere. "It's the perfect price point for them and the perfect length of time," she asserts.

That this offer is highly effective for *The Post* is evident in other channels as well. The offer and messaging of this effort also appear in inserts, door hangers, newspaper ads and online, explains Carr. E-mail campaigns, which *The Post* is doing more and more of, also are coordinated to reinforce direct mail efforts by dropping at the same time. *The Post* also uses this control to support online initiatives; the reply form

of this voucher package asks respondents for their e-mail addresses.

Testing, 1, 2, 3

In addition to the control voucher format, Silver Marketing and *The Post* have tested the 10-for-\$10 offer in a variety of other formats, including letter packages, self-mailers and snap-packs. While some of these test efforts have done well, Carr is quick to point out that none have been able to outperform this winning format, particularly when it comes back to ROI. Even when the more elaborate, full-color packages garner response rates that are on par with the voucher, the cost-effectiveness of the format makes it very difficult to beat.

But that will not discourage *The Post's* direct mail team from trying. Currently, to keep the control performing well within this saturated market, *The Post* also mails a simple, black-and-white snap-pack as an alternating control, and a number of seasonal efforts, including a "Redskins" offer, a "Summer Sizzler" offer and a "New Year, New Deal" package, in which the price of a half-year Sunday-only subscription coincides with the year. For example, the price for 2005 was \$20.05.

Future plans for the voucher control include mailing throughout the summer, but a number of new package tests are on the horizon. According to Carr, a fall test cycle will include a couple of other packages in smaller test cells. While she does not foresee elaborate, full-component packages or long letters in *The Post's* future, she would like to try to test packages with a little more content, such as images, call-outs and interesting facts about features that people may not realize the newspaper has.

"Things go in cycles, and right now the voucher has been the cycle," asserts Carr. "But at some point it's not going to be as fresh." When that happens, *The Post* certainly will be ready. ■

