**CONVERSION CASE STUDY**

Snow Time Inc. Takes Home 2011 Conversion Cup

Newest Industry Award Recognizes Efforts to Create Lifelong Skiers and Riders

• BY TROY HAWKS •

Snow Time Inc., owner of three ski areas in Pennsylvania including Liberty Mountain Resort, Roundtop Mountain Resort, and Whitetail Resort, was named the winner of NSAA’s first annual Conversion Cup Challenge. The announcement was made during NSAA’s National Convention and Tradeshow in Carlsbad, Calif. Other finalists for the Cup included Park City Mountain Resort, Utah, and Boreal Mountain Resort, Calif., both owned by Powdr Corp., based in Park City, Utah. The 2011 Conversion Cup Challenge is sponsored by Head.

In its winning effort, Snow Time collectively taught 47,014 lessons this season, an average of more than 15,600 per ski area. As Chris Dudding, Roundtop Mountain marketing director submits, each of Snow Time’s ski areas are primarily day ski areas drawing their guests from the local metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Md., and Harrisburg and York, Pa.

“Snowsports are not a part of the culture of the region so developing strong programs to attract and retain new guests is very important to our success,” he says.

Snow Time breaks down its approach to converting guests into lifelong enthusiasts into four palpable actions:

1. Promote the ease and affordability of learning
2. Offer guests a program that makes continuation easy and affordable
3. Track the success of guests that arrive at the mountain
4. Follow up with guests as they progress.

**PROMOTING EASE AND AFFORDABILITY**

“Our efforts to attract new guests begins in the summer,” says Dudding. “Our brochures have sections devoted to learning to ski or snowboard as well as links to comprehensive guides for beginners that we post on our websites.”

All told, Snow Time’s team of representatives attend 75 events during the summer and fall, and its lesson packages are promoted heavily on its websites, in weekly email “blasts” to more than 100,000 subscribers, and through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter. Radio and TV spots begin airing in December.

Among its beginner lesson packages, Snow Time’s ski areas drew 6,026 guests to sign on to its $39 learn-to package offered through December 23, and nearly 20,000 more guests bought the same package that was offered on select days in January, which of course is Learn to Ski and Snowboard Month. Also, all Snow Time season pass holders receive a complimentary learn-to package that they can give to a friend or family member.

**OFFERING AFFORDABLE CONTINUATION**

This season Snow Time’s three resorts developed the Mountain Passport program. For $45, the passport provides a complete package (lift, lesson, and rental) for the beginner guest’s second visit. The passport also offers a 40 percent discount on lift tickets and rentals for each additional visit, and one free lesson with each visit. Discounts in the retail shop, on season passes, and on other programs are also included.

Each guest who purchases a lesson package receives a brochure outlining the specifics of the passport program. Staff members in the rental department and learning center are trained to remind guests of the passport promotion. At the end of each lesson, instructors review the benefits of the Mountain Passport and give students a card they can redeem for their passport.

**TRACKING THE SUCCESS OF NEW GUESTS**

Snow Time’s ticketing system allows it to accurately track the number of beginner lessons sold. Guest contact information is captured with each Mountain Passport sold, and through ☛

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the passport, Snow Time is able to view guest purchasing patterns, including when and how often he or she used the passport, and which products were purchased.

Within a week of their initial visit, new guests receive a thank you email and an invitation to complete a survey. At the end of the season, each guest receives additional promotions through direct mail.

As previously mentioned, through its efforts, Snow Time taught more than 47,000 beginner lessons this year, up 9 percent from the 2009/10 season. In addition, more than 12,000 Mountain Passports were sold, a 29 percent increase over 2009/10, and nearly 6,000 guests went on to purchase either a season pass or other promotional pass product.

In all, 17 resorts submitted applications in the first year of the Conversion Cup Challenge. NSAA member ski areas were able to enter in one of three size categories: Up to 200,000 visits; 200,000 to 500,000 visits; and 500,000 or more visits. One finalist is chosen among each size category and the applications are judged on a number of key conversion indicators including:

- Increases in Level 1 lesson volumes;
- Level 1 lesson volumes in relation to total skier and snowboarder visits;
- Quantifiable success of multi-lesson packages;
- Season-to-date sales and repeat sales data on specific “learn-to” packages designed to drive repeat visitation;
- Overall data collection capabilities and sophistication;
- Marketing ingenuity, creativity, use of new media, etc.

“In just its first year, we’re very pleased with overall response to our Conversion Cup Challenge, and the overall depth and quality of information provided in many of the applications certainly impressed the judges,” says NSAA President Michael Berry. “It’s evident that as this competition matures, the efforts put forward and the subsequent success realized as a result of those efforts will flourish, ultimately benefiting the entire industry.”

The Conversion Cup is a traveling award. Snow Time Inc. claims ownership of the Cup for one year, until the next Conversion Cup winner is again crowned at the 2012 NSAA National Convention scheduled for May 6-9 at the Grand Hyatt, San Antonio, Tex. All winners receive a Conversion Cup plaque to display at their ski area.

Find more information under the Marketing menu at nsaa.org.