

CASE STUDY

# Hickory Farms Uses View Time Optimization to Increase Open Rates by 150%



When most people think of seasonal gifts, they think of [Hickory Farms](#) – a gourmet meat and cheese company with a mission to bring people together through effortless gifting. The company started in 1951 by selling handcrafted cheese at county fairs and opened its first retail store in 1959 in Maumee, Ohio. Today, Hickory Farms specializes in gourmet gift baskets, boxes, towers, and gifts with wine for any occasion throughout the year. Its gourmet gift baskets are found online and in a variety of pop-up stores and kiosks in retail shopping centers during the holiday season.

**The challenge:**

## **Struggling to stand out in a crowded inbox.**

While the company offers gifting through its website year-round, it makes the vast majority of its revenue in the last six weeks of the year. Email marketing is a big part of helping to reach that goal. With incredibly loyal customers, Hickory Farms has traditionally received great responses from its email marketing, but 2020 was different. The pandemic pushed more retailers to market their products and services digitally, which meant an increasingly crowded inbox at a crucial point in the company's fiscal year.

Hickory Farms needed a solution to help them reach the inbox at the right time, when their customers were ready to consider what they had to say.

**The solution:**

## **Everest and View Time Optimization (VTO) by Yahoo.**

Enter View Time Optimization (VTO) by Yahoo. Provided within Validity's Everest platform, VTO delivers commercial mail to top inbox positions the moment mailbox users are active, driving more impressions, engagement, and revenue. During the 2020 holiday season, Hickory Farms needed to make sure all its emails were seen, but in particular, seen by a list of recipients already engaged. The reason? It takes more time to try to re-engage folks on the "sometimes responds" lists than it does to communicate with someone you know is already interested in your products. And in 2020, Hickory Farms had to make every effort count.

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We were hesitant at first to use VTO on important days like Cyber Monday and Black Friday, when we knew we would be sending multiple emails a day, but it worked.

**Jen Partin**

Senior Email Marketing Manager

*Jen continued, “Our business is seasonal. We have strong holiday goals and are always fighting for space in the inbox. Anything we can do to get our message lifted is important.”*



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“During the holiday season there is a stronger need to make sure our emails are seen by our customers and don’t get lost in the inbox amongst all of the other retailers,” said Jen Partin, senior email marketing manager at Hickory Farms. “VTO is a valuable tool we realized could help us meet our revenue goals.”

**The results:**

**Exceptional increase in deliverability and subscriber engagement.**

Hickory Farms conducted several tests with control groups on its VTO campaigns, which consistently saw a significant lift in opens and click rates. For its Black Friday campaign, the company saw an 80% increase in opens and a 100% increase in clicks. Additionally, the Cyber Monday campaign (known to be one of the largest drivers of online sales) saw a 150% increase in opens and a 146% increase in clickthroughs. And most recently during an off-season Valentine’s day campaign, Hickory Farms saw a 32% increase in opens and a 39% increase in clicks.

“Everest is a more robust tool, so signing up was a no brainer for me,” said Partin. “Even after only using it for a few weeks, it made a difference immediately—especially the VTO feature. I was up and running within a couple days and was able to get value out of it right away during our busy holiday season.”

“I’m impressed by the whole platform,” Partin continued. “It’s great having everything in one place instead of working with multiple partners, it’s intuitive, and, as a small department of one, it’s helped streamline my work tremendously.”

The results were so overwhelming that Hickory Farms is still calculating the direct impact VTO has made on its revenue numbers. Needless to say, in a year of chaos, the company not only had a successful holiday season, it also exceeded everyone’s expectations, thanks to VTO and Everest.

