

CASE STUDY

Hickory Farms
improves deliverability
and audience
engagement for
increased holiday
revenue.



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 Highlights:

near 100%

INBOX PLACEMENT RATES

99

SENDER SCORE

Significant

YOY REVENUE GROWTH

The challenge:

Struggling to maintain deliverability in a highly seasonal business.

Since 1951, Hickory Farms has helped people build connections and celebrate special moments through expertly curated gifts of gourmet food. While the company offers a wide variety of products through its website year round, it makes a significant amount of their annual revenue in the last six weeks of the year.

Email is among the top revenue-driving channels at Hickory Farms, especially during the busy holiday season. However, the strong seasonality of their business means that engagement tends to drop off during the off season, which can cause deliverability issues as sending ramps up during the critical selling period. Despite an incredibly loyal customer base, Hickory Farms also faces an increasingly crowded inbox since the pandemic pushed more retailers to increase their email marketing activity.



Our business is seasonal. We have aggressive holiday goals and we are always fighting for space in the inbox. Anything we can do to get our message delivered and seen is important.

Jen Partin

Senior Marketing Manager,
Email & SMS

The launch of Apple's Mail Privacy Protection (MPP) compounded the company's normal seasonal challenges. Its September timing made it difficult to determine whether increased engagement was driven by MPP or the return of seasonal traffic.

It goes without saying that time is of the essence when revenue goals are at stake. Hickory Farms needed a solution that would help them execute better email campaigns to maintain engagement year round with minimal effort, and they needed to know their messages would reach the inbox every time—both during the busy holiday season and the slower off season.

The solution:

Everest email deliverability platform, Sender Certification, and expert support.

Hickory Farms made an investment in Validity's Everest email deliverability platform and started the onboarding process just as their peak season hit. With support from their expert customer success manager, they were able to get up to speed and see results almost immediately.

- Everest's easy-to-use dashboard offers Hickory Farms real-time insights into their email performance and any problems that arise, including sudden dips in engagement.
- Custom alerts provide immediate notification of deliverability issues, so they can be corrected before performance is negatively impacted.
- Validity's exclusive Sender Certification program gives Hickory Farms priority status with leading mailbox providers and spam filtering vendors worldwide, helping them achieve superior inbox placement during the busy holiday season and the slower off season.
- Everest's direct integration with Salesforce Marketing Cloud enables automatic seeding of their campaigns for valuable inbox placement insights, and aggregated reporting provides key engagement metrics for each campaign (opens, clicks, bounces, etc.) all in one place.

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If you haven't invested in getting your IP Certified through Validity's Sender Certification program, do it. It really makes a difference in terms of Sender Score and inbox placement rates.

Jen Partin

Senior Marketing Manager,
Email & SMS

- Design testing ensures every message will render exactly as expected across every device and all of the most important mailbox providers, allowing Hickory Farms to plan campaigns around the devices their audience use most and eliminating the need for other point solutions.
- Everest List Validation identifies invalid or questionable email addresses so every send can start from a clean list.
- Everest Engagement Analytics allow for easy segmentation of Apple Mail users so Hickory Farms can track changes in performance metrics caused by MPP.
- With Validity's BIMl Certificates offering, Hickory Farms was able to implement BIMl (Brand Indicators for Message Identification) and capture the attention of their brand loyalists in the inbox.
- Everest View Time Optimization by Yahoo delivers mail to top inbox positions the moment mailbox users are active, driving more impressions and engagement during the busy holiday season.

The partnership with Validity has been critical to navigating Hickory Farms' seasonal challenges with audience engagement. Using the Everest platform, they have built out new campaigns throughout the year (such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day and occasion gifting for Game Day, Halloween, etc.) to keep subscribers engaged outside the traditional holiday season and improve overall deliverability.

With help from Validity, Hickory Farms also implemented a deliberate segmentation strategy to help them avoid deliverability issues. In addition to ramping up send volume as the holidays approach, they now send to active subscribers first and schedule sends to less-engaged segments later.

"I'm so impressed by the whole platform," said Jen Partin, Senior Marketing Manager, Email & SMS at Hickory Farms. "It's great having everything in one place instead of working with multiple partners. It's intuitive and, as a small team of one, it's helped streamline my work tremendously."



When I was using Return Path, I would log in maybe once a quarter because it just wasn't easy and intuitive to use. The Everest platform gives me everything I need. It takes the place of five different technology partners in one quick and easy tool.

Jen Partin

Senior Marketing Manager,
Email & SMS



For more information visit
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The results:

A successful holiday season and the start of a long-term partnership.

After migrating to the Everest platform, Hickory Farms experienced one of their biggest years ever for holiday sales—and email played a key role in that success. With Sender Certification, they achieved a Sender Score of 99 and reached inbox placement rates of near 100%, which is up to 35 percentage points higher than similar non-certified senders. Hickory Farms drove significant growth in revenue for the email channel and, with their continued strong relationship with Validity, have continued to drive impactful YoY revenue growth for their direct business.

Moving forward, Hickory Farms is confident that their email program is up to the task—thanks in part to the expert support from Validity. “As a one-person team, it’s absolutely critical to have a partner I can count on to resolve issues quickly and keep things running smoothly,” Partin said. “There’s a lot going on right now that email marketers need to be aware of, and the Validity team is really helpful in getting me the answers and information that I need.”

Hickory Farms is also taking steps to ensure the long-term health of their email program. By following best practices, they are now able to maintain engagement throughout the year to ensure strong deliverability when they need it most during the busy holiday season.

In addition, Hickory Farms has implemented BIMl with the help of Validity’s BIMl Certificates offering. This allows them to increase credibility and capture more attention in the inbox by displaying a verified logo on their outbound emails.

“Thanks to guidance from the Validity team, we’re on the forefront of things like BIMl. They keep us ahead of the game—and that makes me look good!” Partin said.

