



VA REFER A FRIEND TO FISH CAMPAIGN

RBFF STATE R3 PROGRAM GRANTS

OVERVIEW

Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries (DGIF) launched the *Refer-A-Friend To Fish* campaign in April 2019 with the objective to motivate current licensed anglers in Virginia to recruit new people into fishing. DGIF offered free gifts to anglers who sent a referral code in their Go Outdoors Virginia (GOV) account to any new angler who successfully created a GOV account and entered the code when purchasing their first fishing license. Each successful referral meant that both parties would receive a free gift and also counted as an entry into a monthly prize sweepstakes.

DGIF staff evaluated the 2018 campaign and implemented improvements for 2019 that resulted in an increase in total number of codes generated by current anglers, new fishing customers, and net license sales revenue.

DGIF partnered with *Pure Fishing* to offer Berkley plastic baits as an improved gift that would appeal to anglers of all levels based on the survey results from 2018. To increase participation in the campaign, DGIF also focused on improving the marketing strategy by emphasizing social media advertising and launching the campaign earlier in April to coincide with the spring fishing season that normally results in fishing license sales peaks and increased attention on fishing activities. The changes that were implemented garnered positive results for Refer-A-Friend and provided strong evidence for the longterm viability of this campaign.

RESULTS

Based on survey results:

- 46% of current anglers sent the referral code to a friend and 26% sent to adult family member.
- 43% of new anglers* (code receivers) had previously fished, but not in the last few years; 37% had fished in the last few years; and only 9% never fished before. 54% fished when they were growing up.
*Only new GOV accounts could use a referral code.
- 75% fished or intended to fish with the person who received the code.

Results compared to 2018:

- An increase in total number of referral codes generated: **1,378**, +102 from 2018
 - 12% referred more than 1 person. This is a key result as it demonstrates the effectiveness of a monthly sweepstakes to motivate anglers to generate multiple codes.
- An increase new fishing customer accounts (new customers who used referral codes): **605** +167 from 2018
- An increase net revenue: **\$18,778** (order total) +\$5,865 from 2018

PARTNERS

- Brandt Information Systems
- Pure Fishing and Berkley Baits
- Virginia Industries for the Blind

SUPPORT

"The Refer a Friend program is an integral part of our efforts to increase the number of anglers in Virginia. This important program encourages existing users to take someone new and share with them the outdoor activity that they know and enjoy. Social support plays a critical role in someone's decision to try and/or continue a new activity like fishing; and this program both introduces people to a new activity and provides the social support they need to continue with that activity in the future" - Brian Moyer, Assistant Director of Outreach

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METHODOLOGY

To increase participation in Refer-A-Friend, DGIF focused its efforts in 2019 on maximizing and expanding its reach to the target audience of current anglers. Using Facebook for Business, staff could test two different display ads to “lookalike” audiences that were created based on similar characteristics to DGIF’s current fishing customer.

Both ads used variations of the same image of people fishing together. However, the messages differed so the effectiveness of two main angler motivations for participating in this campaign could be compared.

- “Ad 1” focused on the idea that fishing is better with a friend and appealed to the social benefits of fishing.
- “Ad 2” concentrated only on the rewards and opportunity to get something free for participating.

Both ads received an equal amount of \$2,000 and ran for two weeks.

- “Ad 1” reached 47,095 people and generated 2,036 clicks
- “Ad 2” reached 46,687 people and generated 1,990 clicks.

Similar outcomes made it difficult to judge which messages were more effective. However, the ad campaign was successful overall since its reach was expanded to nearly 100,000 new people. This unexpected result shows that more testing and different ad variations are needed, and that Facebook is a powerful tool that can be used in future marketing efforts.

BENEFITS

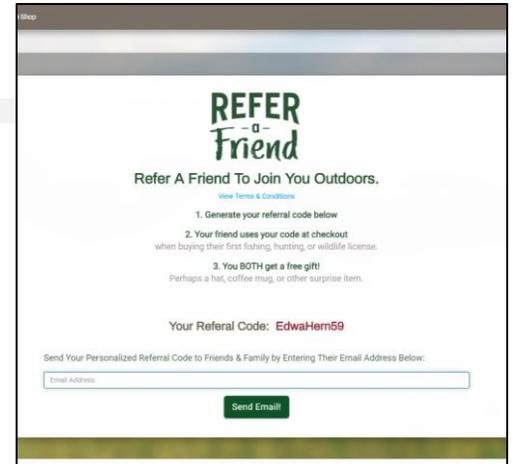
The success of this campaign provides strong evidence to other state fish and wildlife agencies that referral programs can be an effective marketing device to generate license sales and create new customer accounts. The process and tactics involved with creating this campaign, along with the evaluation methods, provides a blueprint to other state agencies that have the capability to implement a similar referral program.

One important takeaway from the post-campaign survey is that the majority of current anglers sent their referral codes to people that already have fishing experience, while only 9% of code receivers had no previous fishing experience. This suggests that referral campaigns might be a more effective as a fishing reactivation tool rather than a fishing recruitment tool.

LESSONS LEARNED/FUTURE PLANS

For DGIF, referral programs may remain effective or even improve as more participants adopt the GOV license system to purchase licenses and learn about the program. Long-term, this program could have diminishing returns if the requirement for participation is to recruit a newcomer who has never held a license or GOV account. If participation does slow, DGIF has considered making it biennial or run every few years. In the short-term, greater rewards and improved marketing will be the focus and should prompt greater participation from anglers who are aware of this program but have not yet participated. Greater rewards may also prompt current participants to refer “weaker ties” such as extended family or less familiar acquaintances. DGIF is planning to continuously monitor program participants to determine whether a greater marketing effort or higher cost rewards should be invested in to attract more customers.

This grant program was conducted in 2019 and partially funded by the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation (RBFF) through a USFWS financial assistance award (#F18AC00145). For more information on RBFF’s State R3 Program Grants, please visit www.takemefishing.org/r3.



Refer A Friend Code



Ad1- Fishing is Better with a Friend



Ad2- Get a Free Gift