

The Keys to Annual Pass Promotions

EACH SUMMER AS THE SHADOWS GROW LONG and the traditional summer operating season begins to wane, the promise—and promotions—begin for the next season.

Tapping into the momentum of summer's final days and the start of the school calendar, seasonal attractions of all sizes can provide hope that there's more fun in the future—with an annual pass.

Passholders play a pivotal role within the amusement and theme park communities, serving as advocates who spread positive word-of-mouth, engage on social media, and exhibit a greater propensity to indulge in park offerings when unburdened by the need to purchase single-day tickets.

Perfect Timing

Mariah Fritzges, corporate manager, marketing & brand management for Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park, California, explains the logic of the park's annual pass promotion timing.

"The upcoming year's passes have been launching near the end of summer to be able to reach a larger audience before vacations come to an end and school begins. By launching before the peak season is over, we're able to have a stronger market presence," she says.

Similarly, Quassy Amusement and Waterpark in Middlebury, Connecticut, begins promotions for the seasonal park's annual passes in mid-August.

"While this is not our largest season pass sale of the year, we're able to lock in 2024 sales during this year's peak season, when we're already top-of-mind with guests," says park president Eric Anderson.

Julie Dion, founder of Dion Marketing, concentrates on the attractions industry and handles marketing for several attractions in the United States, including Quassy. "Ideally, parks have invested in point-of-sale systems with marketing capabilities, such as breaking out season pass sales from general admission tickets," she explains. "Quassy targets guests who have bought a general admission ticket within the last year and is able to do so through email and digital marketing."

Yet, for Daytona Lagoon, a seasonal water park and year-round FEC in Daytona Beach, Florida, launching a season pass campaign in mid-August is a newer concept. "We tried it last year for the first time and were happy with the results," says General Manager Tyler Currie. "Black Friday through Cyber Monday has traditionally not only been the launch of season pass sales for the next year's season, but is also by far the largest sale each year where we offer the best price."




Tyler Currie, Daytona Lagoon GM; and Julie Dion, founder of Dion Marketing, meet in August 2023 to discuss 2024 marketing strategies.

Marketing Anticipation

Many attractions have found success cross-promoting season pass sales with the announcement of a new ride or attraction opening the following year. Bundling a new attraction announcement with annual pass sales offers an opportunity to create the perception of increased annual pass value—and is possibly a key time to increase prices and to drive greater revenue.

"Season passholders are very interested in what's being added to the park," says Anderson of Quassy. "They not only repeat visits in a season, but many renew every year. Having something new to promote helps with retention for sure."

What marketing medium is best for connecting with guests? Dion notes the importance of leveraging all assets. "When it comes to advertising spending, the best methodology has been through a funneled marketing approach that incorporates all assets to create an integrated ad campaign. Email is by far the best for season pass renewals because attractions already have that contact information. Digital marketing is the quickest path to purchase, with more than half of our clients' season passes sold online."

While the strategies above can be utilized in 2025 marketing plans, Efteling theme park in Kaatsheuvel, Netherlands, takes a different tack: the park doesn't engage in an annual pass campaign. Rather, Efteling engages in a loyalty program with annual passholders, communicating park news through weekly blogs and a special newsletter. "In addition, we often invite them for previews of new attractions," says Karin Koppelmans, the park's senior communications staff member. "Of course, we stay in touch about renewing their pass subscription once it expires. Here, we combine online advertising, physical direct mails, and email marketing." 

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