



## Case Study: HomeStretch Run the River 5K/10K

# Non-Profit Event Uses Affordable Marketing Techniques To Max Out Participation

## Background

The heart of HomeStretch's mission is helping homeless families get back on their feet and into permanent, sustainable housing. After nearly 20 years in existence, HomeStretch owns and operates 27 homes in the town of Roswell, GA. Trained social workers provide direct assistance to the families and over 800 caring citizens commit their time and energy to ensure the success of the program. Keeping the organization running is no small endeavor—in addition to generous support from the community, Homestretch holds an annual road race fundraiser along the scenic Chattahoochee River. All proceeds from the Run the River 5K/10K are used to continue Homestretch's mission of providing housing, hope, and life skills to homeless families.



## Challenges

Run the River 5K/10K is fortunate in that it can count on substantial community support: 120+ race day volunteers come from the local churches & civic organizations; neighborhood businesses donate all food, beverages, and raffle items; police assist with all road closures and safety precautions; and paramedics are on standby for any emergencies. The challenge that HomeStretch and the race committee did face was sustaining and increasing participation. In 2002 when the race debuted, over 800 participants registered and about that number returned in 2003. The third year it rained, dropping registration numbers to the low 500s, where they remained for the next few years. In 2009, the Run the River organizers decided it was time to try something new and reallocate some of the budget that had previously been reserved for local advertisements. "We knew there was a lot of opportunity to pull more participants from Roswell, as well as from the North Metro Atlanta area," mentions Steve Buck, event director for Run the River. "It was just a matter of reaching them."

## Solution

HomeStretch had been using online race registration from Active Network since its inaugural year and knew Active also provided marketing services. Steve spoke to his account manager at Active to learn more about the programs and what they could offer. "I liked the options—it was a great deal for the money and our reach would be extended much further through Active's channels than we could achieve our own." The first part of the race marketing plan focused on online advertisements. This included seven Event Spotlight listings in Active's geo-targeted Local Events newsletters, sent to thousands of opt-in subscribers;

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Steve Buck, Event Director for Run the River, Roswell, GA

and 30,000 online advertising impressions on the Active.com and ActiveRunner Newsletter pages, which attract millions of visitors each month. The second element of the plan involved building an email marketing effort. HomeStretch aimed to send a series of five emails over four months, advising past participants of registration open and close dates, as well as registration fees. With these two tactics in place, Steve and his team felt comfortable cutting back on local advertisements. HomeStretch still distributed Run the River brochures and flyers in the community and enlisted the help of local businesses, but hopes were high that the non-profit event marketing would be the magnet that drew the crowd.

### Results

As the race marketing plan rolled out, the event organizers were thrilled to see that their investment paid off. In 2009, registration numbers jumped to over 1000 participants. When the marketing efforts were replicated in 2010, participation increased yet again to reach 1250 registrants. “To see our numbers essentially double that quickly is a strong indication to me that the marketing plan worked,” Steve notes. In addition to getting the word out to new participants with online advertising, HomeStretch has seen a lot of repeat registrants over the past two years and realizes that the emails to past participants are effective as well. The bottom line is that the organization is consistently getting the word out and the community is responding. HomeStretch has proved that with a targeted marketing plan and some common sense, it is possible to increase participation on a limited budget.

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### What’s Next

For 2011 and beyond, HomeStretch is dedicated to promoting Run the River primarily through Active’s e-marketing channels. “Due to the success of the marketing plan, we are close to being maxed out,” mentions Steve. “We can only accommodate 1300 participants total because of parking limitations.” With the non-profit event marketing plan set and participation at a high, the organizers can now focus their attentions on other areas of the race. Steve and his team will be dedicating time to building out pledge raising efforts with a volunteer committee, as well as trying to attract more sponsorships. These goals, combined with the commitment from both the staff and the public to support Run the River and HomeStretch, promise to bring the organization even more success in upcoming years.