

# A DINING CARD THAT WORKS

by Rick Matsumoto

## RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Circulation executives at the [Reno Gazette-Journal](#) (Reno, NV), unintimidated by the spotty success of other dining card programs, achieved great results with their EZ Pass program.

### Background

Just about every newspaper in the country has tried some sort of dining card program as a subscriber acquisition and retention tool. The basic idea is to use a dining card – which entitles consumers to a discount at participating restaurants – as an incentive to subscribe to the newspaper. It's one of those ideas that often looks better on paper than it does in practice.

Experience suggests that the success factors are simplicity and discipline. The program must be easy to understand and remember for both consumers and participating restaurants. Newspaper executives must have the discipline to not only keep the program simple, but also to stick with it long enough to reap the rewards. Such programs are often better at increasing retention than they are in generating orders.

### How It Works

“Our goal was to drive customers to our EZ Pay program and reward current customers for their loyalty,” explained Liz Hill, sales manager. “So we created the EZ Pass dining card, good for 20 percent off the dining bill at 35 restaurants.”

The discount applies to the total food bill only and is good for a party of up to four people. Participating restaurants absorb the discount in exchange for in-paper promotion. The EZ Pass cards are printed in-house with a heat-set embosser for less than 12¢ a piece. They are personalized with name, account number and expiration date.

“The beauty of the EZ Pass is that all restaurants play by the same rules, so it does not confuse the consumer,” says Hill. “We've made it a priority to seek out an appropriate mix of restaurants so as not to devalue the promotion.”

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**With EZPass you get...**

- A Dining Card that fits your lifestyle
- Reno Gazette-Journal Delivered Everyday
- No Hassle Billing through EZPay
- How much will your family save?

**Getting your EZPass is as easy as subscribing to the paper.**

Only \$16.25 per month billed automatically to your credit card.

**EZPass Restaurants** [click for list](#)

## Results

In August of 2003 when the EZ Pass program was launched, the Gazette-Journal had 7,568 subscribers on EZ Pay, representing 14 percent of their base. Just six months later, there were 9,688 subscribers on EZ Pay, representing over 18 percent of their base.

Hill reports the feedback has been outstanding. Even employees that were not subscribers have signed up for a subscription because some of their favorite restaurants were in the program!

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