Stine Home & Yard and AdRocket Boost:
Reaching the Right Consumers on All the Right Channels

Stine Home & Yard has a storied history of facing competition head on. Since the 1950s, the second-generation family-owned retailer based in Louisiana has had its share of tough competition, market downturns, changing consumer behaviors and even a devastating natural disaster. Despite it all, founder and centenarian J.W. Stine, a decorated World War II combat pilot, always embraced change by investing in the business, its people and the communities it serves. A brief history:

In the 1970s, when small town lumber yards were being replaced by home centers to attract more consumers to supplement the builder trade, Stine responded by building a new 10,000-square-foot showroom, replacing its original 2,500-square-foot builder yard.

In the 1980s, as big box competition reached Louisiana, Stine evolved with a new format of its own: A larger showroom floor, garden center and a new drive-through lumber yard, the first of its kind in the South.

By 2000, Stine's expansion efforts grew from three to 10 stores. In 2005, Stine would rebuild three stores in the wake of Hurricane Rita as well as construct two new ones.

Then came the Recession of 2008, which necessitated efficiency and accountability. This paid off for Stine Home & Yard as did an unyielding entrepreneurial spirit and eight core values set forth by J.W.: Faith, Family, Community, Integrity, Passion, Service, Accountability and Safety. He instilled these in his six sons, who have been at the helm of the business since he retired in the early '80s.

Today, Stine Home & Yard comprises 11 large-format stores—10 in Louisiana and one in Mississippi—six of which have drive-through lumber yards. Combined, the stores total more than 550,000 square feet of space for home improvement merchandise, building supplies and appliances.

Stine ranks in the top 50 of the “Top 200 Pro Dealer Industry Scoreboard” produced by HBSDealer Magazine, which awarded Stine the Retailer of the Year Award in 2014 for its “ability to grow sales year after year in competitive markets with a strong customer focus.” According to HBSDealer, the Retailer of the Year award recognizes “a retail company that has shown strong performance, embraces industry best practices and holds ambitious plans for the future.”

Incidentally, Home Depot and Lowe’s won the same award in 2006 and 2008, respectively.
Digital had been on the low end of the ad spend, according to Jeremy, who pointed to the “Facebook only” approach as a deficit in their digital ad strategy.

“Facebook and Google control close to 70 percent of the digital ad market share, and that’s where our customers are,” said Jeremy.

“We knew we were missing a big slice of the market.”

He continued, “We needed to be on that channel (Google) to gain exposure to our relevant customer base with frequency.”

But running ads on Google would require an outside provider. Running the Facebook ads alone was already taking “an inordinate amount” of Jeremy’s time. Creating just one carousel ad (which allows for multiple images and/or videos with headlines, links and calls to action) could take hours. Also, knowing the time and attention it took to ensure Stine Home & Yard showed up on people’s news feeds consistently throughout the year, Jeremy knew he didn’t have the internal staff to manage advertising on Google, calling it “an impossibility.”

He knew he needed an expert, preferably a Premier Google Partner with a deep understanding of what he was trying to accomplish given Stine’s year-round ad strategy.

The answer became clear when VP of Marketing David Stine, Jeremy’s dad, attended an AdRocket™ presentation at Nationwide’s PrimeTime event in August 2018.

During the presentation, RWS COO Jennie Gilbert discussed the merits of the new AdRocket Boost program for retailers: Much like a digital ad agency, the RWS team of Dedicated Digital Advisors works with retailers to develop and execute custom-branded campaigns for their stores on Facebook as well as the Google Advertising Network, which includes Search and Display. Digital Advisors provide retailers with ad strategy and design, as well as monitoring and expert analysis throughout the campaigns.

Soon after the show, David connected Jeremy with RWS for more information.

In-Step with Customers, In-Line with Competitors

As Stine Home & Yard has faced-off with a bevy of market forces over the years, one thing has remained constant: Stine has stayed in step with customers not only by upholding their core values, but also by keeping up with the customer journey. As the retailer has grown, so too have the channels by which they have reached consumers with their “Better brands, lower prices guaranteed!” message.

According to Marketing Director Jeremy Stine, J.W.’s grandson, the store has seen—and experienced—the evolution of marketing, particularly in advertising, dating “back to the days when ABC, CBS and NBC were the only channels.”

The primary digital presence for the retailer today consists of its two websites: stinehome.com, built in-house for its lumber, home improvement and building supplies; and stineappliances.com, built by Retailer Web Services (RWS) for its appliance brands.

As part of digital marketing efforts over the past eight years, Jeremy has “personally placed” various types of Facebook and Instagram ads for the independent home improvement retailer. The Stine marketing team of four had been determining the campaigns, setting the objectives, selecting the audience targeting criteria, creating the ads, selecting imagery, writing messaging, monitoring the campaigns and measuring analytics—not a small feat, considering they also manage advertising for Stine on traditional channels such as TV, radio, billboards and direct mail (39 circulars per year).

Why such a robust ad plan?

“We stay in line with where our competitors are,” explained Jeremy, “so our ad budget is around 2 percent of our annual gross sales ($200 million) in terms of how that gets spread out among broadcast, print and digital advertising.”
The 'Turnkey' Solution

By early October, the Stine team made the decision to move forward with an ad budget of $20,000 to promote their appliances during November and to have AdRocket Boost run the majority of the campaigns in Google (Display and Text); 5 percent of the budget was allocated to Facebook remarketing. Up until then, Jeremy hadn't utilized the Facebook remarketing feature which retargets customers that have already visited a website directly on Facebook.

“The way it (AdRocket Boost) was presented to us and the fact that they’re a Premier Google Partner, we knew right away RWS had the knowledge base we were looking for,” said Jeremy.

“When we talked with RWS, it was ‘tell us what you’re looking to do, and we’ll create all the copy and creative.’ It was turnkey. I didn’t have to go out and hire a whole team.

“Not only is RWS well versed in Google advertising, they know the appliance market inside and out. They know our products so well, they were able to grab all the URLs and images needed for the campaigns.

“We could’ve gone out and looked for another Premier Google Partner, but none have the deep product knowledge that RWS does.”

Prior to the AdRocket Boost ads going live on Oct. 31, RWS upgraded stineappliances.com to Level 4 and migrated the site to “Socrates,” WebFronts® latest design platform, for a best-in-class user experience and optimal return on the new traffic the ads would bring to the site.

“One planning call and our ads were live in a couple of weeks—and they (RWS) rolled out a new site before we even went live. It’s been one of the best experiences I’ve had working with them,” said Jeremy.

“We love working with RWS. They made it stress free during the chaotic selling season.”

Ad Inventory

More than 40 ads—triple the amount that ran on Facebook in November 2017—and their corresponding landing pages were created by RWS’ AdRocket Boost team based on the circulars Stine was running for Black Friday. This also included the creation of holiday packages on the Stine site for the ads promoting the packages to link to for detailed information.

In addition to the various Black Friday appliance ads, Stine and RWS worked together, brainstorming the “Top 5 Reasons Why?” consumers should choose Stine instead of their competitors:

1. APPLIANCE REPAIR 2. OPEN SEVEN DAYS A WEEK 3. EXCLUSIVE REBATES 4. PRICE MATCH GUARANTEE 5. SPECIAL 12-MONTH FINANCING

The reasons were turned into evergreen ad inventory that also ran in November, maintaining a strong brand presence for Stine during the holiday season. It was a first for the retailer to advertise their exclusive rebates offering. The evergreen ads also ran in December alongside that month’s special promotions and will run as part of Stine’s 2019 digital ad strategy as well.
Reporting Tool Results

Concluding on Nov. 30, the ads generated nearly 20,000 visitors to the site, approximately the same amount that the 2017 Facebook ads generated for the same cost, according to Jeremy. However, the important difference between the November 2017 visitors to the site and those in 2018: The 2018 users were more qualified. They came from (clicking on) the AdRocket ads to stineappliances.com from different channels.

"Coming from both Google and Facebook resulted in a better mix of customers spending more time on the site," said Jeremy. "We feel a more qualified customer is a more engaged customer on our site, which ultimately results in more sales."

A campaign goal for Jeremy was for Stine Home & Yard to appear when people searched competitors. In the first week of the November ads, results from the AdRocket Boost Reporting tool were already showing Stine’s top keywords and search terms; “lowes black friday 2018” was in the top 10 search terms. At month’s end, it was No. 3.

Also, the report showed the traffic the ads were generating to the site were additive, i.e., new and additional, not consumers who would have gone to their site otherwise. Traffic before and after the Oct. 31st campaigns began showed a significant uptick.

The AdRocket Boost Reporting tool itself also received accolades from Jeremy, who monitored the campaigns every few days and appreciated having “everything available at our fingertips in one click.” The tool aggregates data from the campaigns in real time on one page that’s “easy to consume.”

A Change in Ad Plan for 2019

For Stine Home & Yard, the 2019 advertising plan pulls additional dollars from print and allocates them to digital channels. As Jeremy sees it:

“If you don’t cut back a little on print and put it towards digital, you’re doing your customers a disservice.”

His advice to other independent retailers sounds as if taken from the Stine Family Business Playbook: “Let’s face it, the vast majority of customers today have a smartphone in their pocket and they’re doing quick searches. Our competitors know this, too. You can’t afford to ignore the reality of the situation. Doing so will harm your brand and your business.”