

A NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO

Increasing Season Pass Renewal Rates

The more you think of improving pass renewal rates as a year-round effort, the more likely you are to have the tools, data, and odds in your favor once passes go on sale.



INNTOPIA

The Season Pass Era

Season passes have changed the game for marketers. Teams that once measured success largely by sales of individual lift tickets now see season pass sales as their highest priority. Multi-resort products have amplified pass competition by making any skier in any market a potential buyer of at least a few different passes.

Along the way, season pass renewal rates went from an interesting insight to a critical KPI. There are many factors in this fight that you have no power over such as weather, the economy, competition, or even pricing decisions. Rather than shake our fists in futility at these factors, we're instead going to focus this guide on what we can control.

In the following pages we'll discuss seven practical, proven strategies that can help you get the maximum number of last year's passholders to become passholders this year, regardless of whether you're hoping for record renewals, aiming to stay flat, or simply doing your best to keep churn to a minimum. We've seen these strategies move the needle for the resorts we work with, and we believe they can do the same for you and your team this season.

Improving passholder retention is getting trickier, but it's not impossible. Let's explore the most effective ways to move this needle.

Pre-Flight Checklist

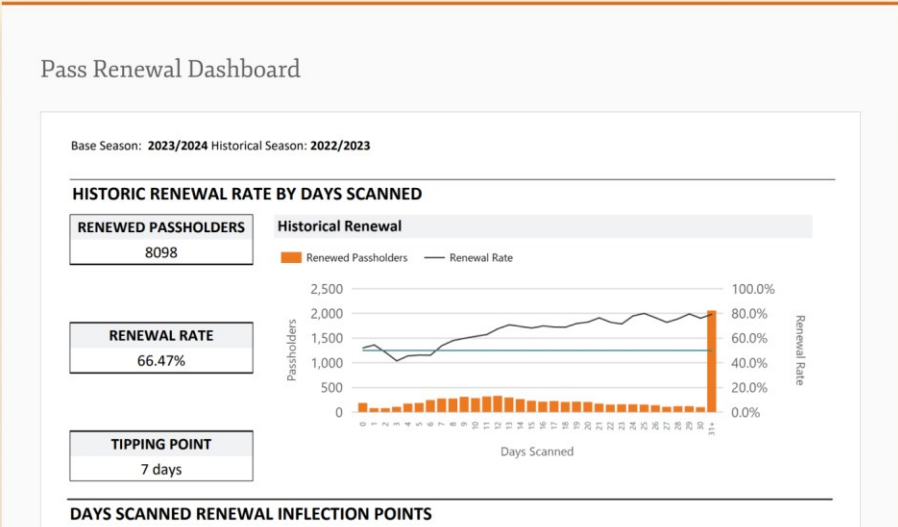
Just like you need to hire lift operators before you can think about opening for the season, there are a few tools you need to have in place before you begin any sort of renewal rate optimization effort.

#1) Pass Usage Monitoring

Perhaps the largest factor that plays into a skier's decision to renew is how many days they use their pass. This is absolutely something you can influence, but to do so you'll need visibility into these trends. Primarily, you need to be able to:

- Track how many times each passholder has visited.
- Measure how many passholders fall into each visitation group.
- Compare each group to this same time during previous seasons.
- Understand exactly who those skiers are in your guest database.

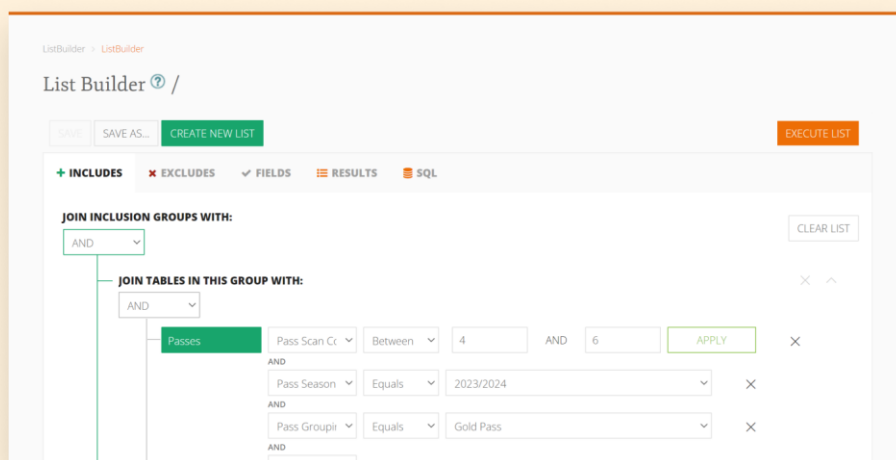
The Pass Renewal Dashboard allows you to track how many days your passholders have skied this year, the size of each group, and which inflection points you might want to focus on.



#2) Visitation-Based Passholder Audiences

That last point - who those skiers are in your database - is key. In order to drive behavior within each group, you'll need to segment out passholders by visitation so you can talk to each group individually. So, beyond pass usage, you'll need contact information that can be used to match or target these guests on your primary marketing channels including email, social, direct mail, and display.

You can build these audiences in List Builder by using the Pass Scan Count trait and setting a range of values you'd like to include in your audience.



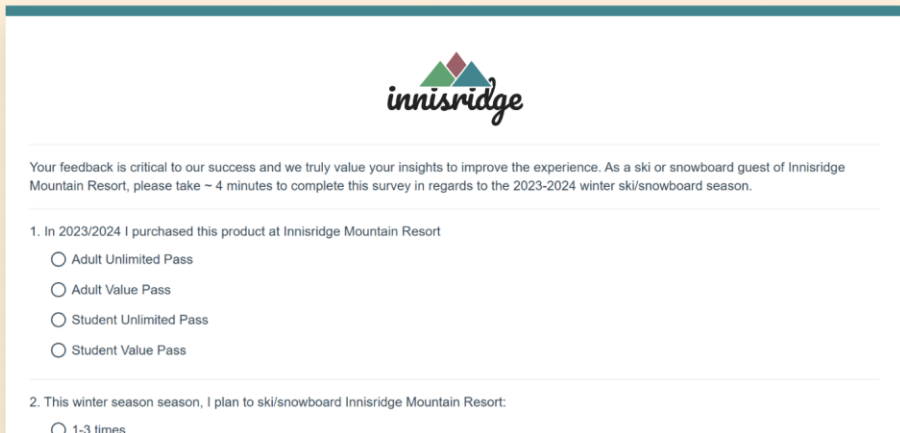
#3) Always Have Audiences Ready

Ideally, your team can quickly query passholders and sync each segment to marketing channels. If this process takes more manual work, try to always have some version of these audiences ready throughout the season even if they are a little out of date. If it takes weeks to get these audiences built, noticing trends during early spring may leave you with no time to act before the season ends.

#4) Measure Passholder Sentiment

One of the most insightful, but often overlooked, steps is to survey your passholders a month or so before making any key decisions around your pass strategy or beginning pass sales. Ask your passholders simple, targeted questions to get a feel for how their season is going, how likely they are to renew as it stands, what factors might influence them one way or the other, and any other insights that provide qualitative data to build your tactics around.

Passholder surveys are a great way to get timely insights into your passholders' feelings about the season before you make strategic plans for this year's pass sale.



The image shows a screenshot of a survey form for Innisridge Mountain Resort. At the top center is the Innisridge logo, which consists of three stylized mountain peaks in green, blue, and red above the word "innisridge" in a lowercase, cursive font. Below the logo is a horizontal line, followed by a paragraph of text: "Your feedback is critical to our success and we truly value your insights to improve the experience. As a ski or snowboard guest of Innisridge Mountain Resort, please take ~ 4 minutes to complete this survey in regards to the 2023-2024 winter ski/snowboard season." Below this text is another horizontal line, followed by two numbered questions. Question 1 is "1. In 2023/2024 I purchased this product at Innisridge Mountain Resort" and has four radio button options: "Adult Unlimited Pass", "Adult Value Pass", "Student Unlimited Pass", and "Student Value Pass". Question 2 is "2. This winter season season, I plan to ski/snowboard Innisridge Mountain Resort:" and has one radio button option: "1-3 times".

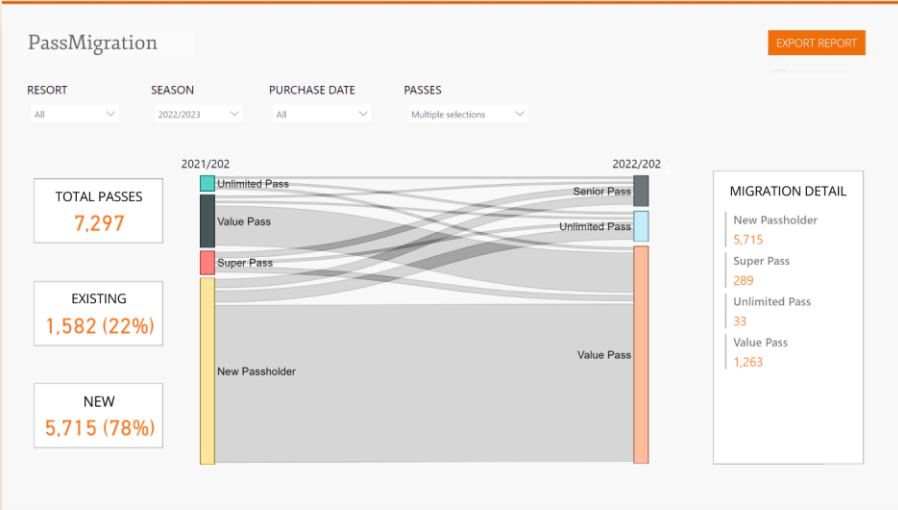
#5) Renewal & Migration Tracking

It may sound obvious that you need to be able to track how many people are renewing, but, as we'll discuss in the tactics section, it's important you can do this on the fly so you can target low-usage groups as needed before it's too late.

The other side of this coin is that you'll also want to understand what products your passholders are migrating to if they aren't renewing.

For example, you have probably designed at least one product to act as a bridge between day tickets and season passes. Understanding if low usage passholders who don't renew are in fact migrating to those products (or vice versa) will help you know if you're losing these passholders completely or they're simply choosing a different product they feel better aligns to their needs.

The Pass Migration Report helps you visualize how your customers move between the various products you offer during the season.



Strategies & Tactics

With our data, audiences, and tracking in place, it's time to start planning the campaigns and concepts we'll use to keep your renewal rates as high as possible.

#1) Incentivize Visitation Among Low-Use Passholders

Removing weather dependency from your ability to drive passholder visitation can be a powerful ally. The idea here is simple: If you can lure skiers back up to the mountain a few more times than they otherwise would, these extra visits will increase the likelihood these passholders will see last year's pass as worth the price they paid and renew once the season ends. As you build these campaigns, there are a few key elements to consider.



FOCUS ON LOW-USAGE PASSHOLDERS

Your passholders with 20+ days on the mountain are already highly likely to buy a pass again next year. And even if you do change their behavior, getting them to ski one more day will make very little difference in terms of how likely they are to renew. Instead, focus on guests who have skied fewer than 10 days and especially those whose current likelihood of renewal is less than 50% (usually passholders with fewer than 5-6 visits). Getting them to visit just one additional day can significantly increase their likelihood of renewal.

MANUAL ONE-TIME VS AUTOMATED SEASON-LONG CAMPAIGNS


The next question to ask is whether you want to build a season-long campaign or a one-time campaign to incentivize visitation.

Season-long campaigns are automated and are usually set up during the off season. The idea is to use automated emails to showcase a potential reward when passholders reach a specific number of days on the mountain. For example, if a free hat is unlocked at 10 days, let that passholder know about the potential reward after their first visit and remind them about their progress after 5 visits. After their 9th day on the mountain, inform them how to pick up their reward during their next visit. Again, this can all be automated and set up in advance.

Congrats on Ten Days This Year!

John, we just wanted to celebrate the fact that you've skied ten total days this year! To celebrate, stop by the Guest Services desk right by the ticket windows, show them this email, and you'll get a free Innisridge passholder beanie!



Loyalty Recognition campaigns drive similar behaviors as full loyalty programs completely via email automation.

Learn more about this and other automated campaigns in our Ultimate Guide to Resort Marketing Automation.



One-time campaigns are typically run toward the end of the season though some resorts will repeat these emails multiple times. Circle a date (or two) on the calendar to check in on usage, identify the groups that are at risk of churning without more visitation, and build campaigns for each group that encourage them to make another visit. Even small incentives can be the difference between passholders skiing a couple more days or packing their skis away for the winter once spring arrives.

INCENTIVES

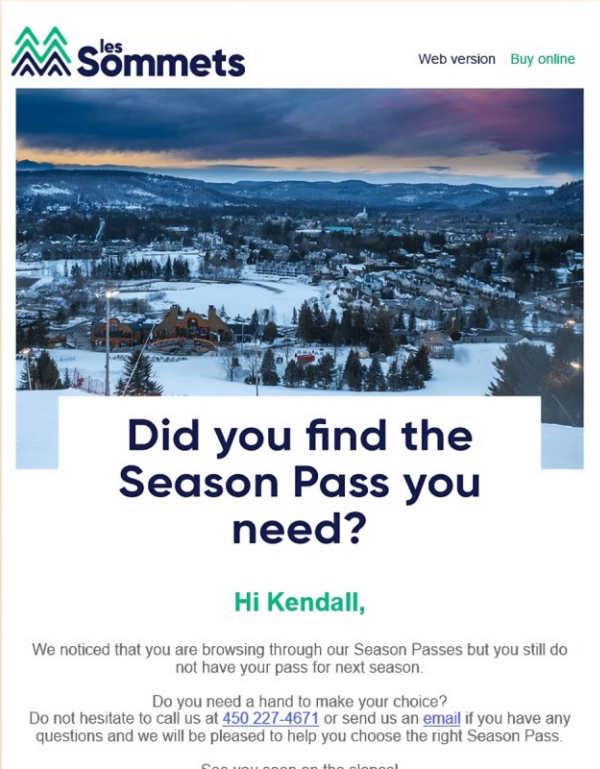
Find incentives that require passholders to visit in order to get the reward. For example, if you give passholders a t-shirt for reaching a certain number of days, don't mail that swag to the passholder. Instead, inform them that they can pick up their reward at the resort to ensure that every reward corresponds to your goal; an additional visit. Once again, it doesn't take much. If a pin can incentivize skiers to reach 100 days, something as simple as a small resort credit can be enough to get someone from 3 days to 5.

#2) Follow Up with Passholders Who Shop but Don't Buy

The more formal definition for this is an abandoned browse campaign, but putting this tactic in plain English is a good reminder that there is a reason they're not buying even though they're interested enough to start shopping. Try to get to the bottom of those reasons before you start building this campaign.

Are they getting confused by the season pass table? Are they skeptical of how much the price will go up at your next deadline? Are

they confused about which pass they should buy? Once you identify some of those reasons, build an automated email that is sent to guests who spent time on your season pass page but didn't buy.



With a subject line of "Need Help Deciding?" Les Sommets simply offered their passholders an easy way to get their questions answered and saw a revenue/email of \$30.96 as a result.

Read the full story about this campaign.



When Les Sommets ran this campaign a few years ago, they realized a handful of unanswered questions were leaving shoppers with enough uncertainty to not complete checkout. Les Sommets designed a campaign that simply showed these passholders where to get answers. This one campaign ended up providing a timely boost to renewal rates during the peak of pass sales season.

#3) Reach Passholders When They're Most Likely to Buy

Like resorts, humans tend to do things in predictable cycles. For example, when you look at the lodging reservations of individual guests, you'll often see a pattern around which time of year they tend to book a reservation. The same is true for passholders. Season passholders tend to buy their passes right around the same time each season.

Use email marketing automation based on each guest's purchase date last year to reach guests with a reminder to buy this year's pass. Just a nudge is often all that's needed. This campaign works so well that Mt Bachelor drove nearly \$250,000 of revenue in the first month after they first turned this campaign on for their passholders.

"In the first month this campaign generated \$265,000 in revenue. It's been a perfect compliment to all of our other season pass marketing."

Mt Bachelor

Read the full story about this campaign.



Hey Sarah,

That pass looks good on you, are you ready to take it for another spin? We noticed that you haven't purchased your pass for the 2023/24 Winter season yet — don't miss the May 31 deadline to get the lowest price!

Early bird purchasers who **drop in by May 31, 2023** get the best price on all 2023/24 Mt. Bachelor season passes *and* can take advantage of our payment plan option for Outplay 365, Full Season, and Midweek passes. Now is the time to scoop one up and lock in your winter plans. Don't hesitate — good times and adventure await!

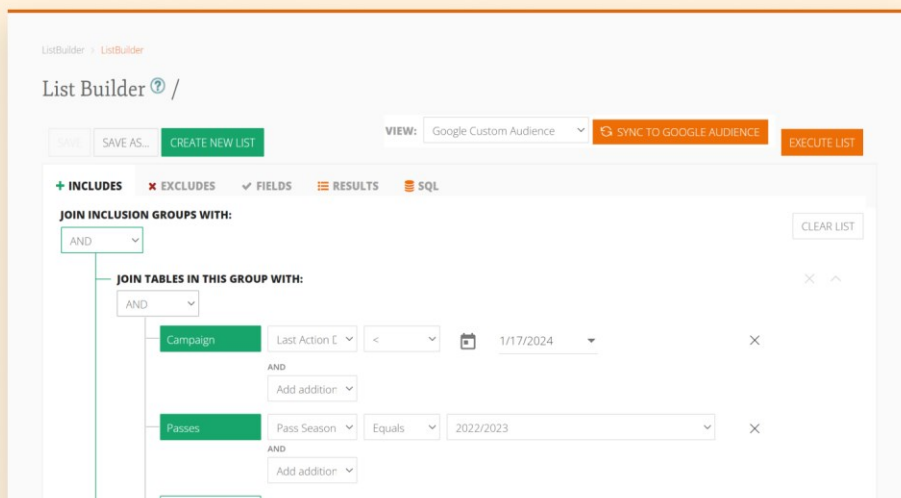
PRICES INCREASE AFTER MAY 31

#4) Target Passholders Across Multiple Channels

The highest renewal rates often come from segments of guests who are reached on multiple channels, so try not to think about marketing channels as an either/or question when targeting passholders during sales season. Instead, look for ways to use multiple channels in tandem to increase the likelihood your passholders will see and act on your campaigns.

For example, email will likely drive most of your revenue but what about those passholders who haven't been opening your emails? Export those disengaged email recipients into a Google Audience, direct mail list, or Facebook audience and serve messaging to them on those channels as well. However, don't be afraid to target folks who already engage on one channel but still haven't renewed, especially around deadlines. Again, renewal rates are often highest among guests who see your messages on multiple channels.

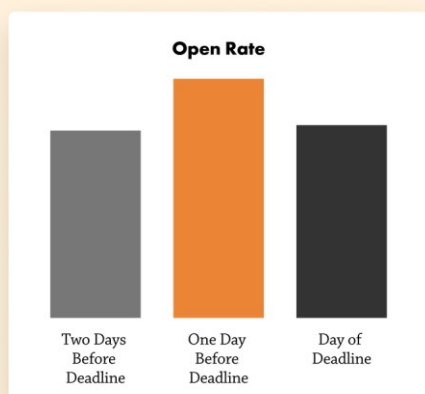
Use traits like Last Action Date or Opened Count along with passholder status for a given season to identify passholders who aren't engaging with your emails. Then sync those audiences to Google, Facebook, and more.



#5) Be Careful, but Opportunistic, Around Deadlines

A few years ago we looked at the number of season passes sold between fall deadlines for a dozen U.S. resorts. We found that about 20% of pass sales typically happened during the final 24 hours before a deadline. Email open rates also tend to spike during this stretch, with the day before the deadline seeing the highest engagement.

Open and click rates are typically high leading up to season pass deadlines, but engagement with these emails tends to peak the day before the deadline rather than the day of.



Deadline emails work, but it's important you stay focused on passholders who are likely to buy in order to maintain deliverability and not raise red flags with inbox providers as you ramp up your email frequency. A segment of skiers from 5 states away who purchased lift tickets a few years ago is fine to target every now and then, but avoid broad segments when you're sending a lot of emails. Staying focused on groups that are more likely to buy will typically

have very little impact on total sales while ensuring you don't lose the ability to reach your primary audiences' inboxes during these critical marketing stretches.

#6) Place Extra Focus on Spring Buyers During Spring

We've already discussed how passholder behavior tends to show up in patterns on an individual level but consider that concept from a competitive angle as well. If a passholder tends to buy each spring, that means that's also the time of year they might be considering other passes. Spring really is the time this idea seems to be most prevalent. If someone who typically buys during the spring hasn't renewed by summer, there's a good chance they're gone, and no amount of fall marketing can get them back.

When you're building audiences and planning your strategy, ensure you have a way to speak to passholders who usually purchase during the spring. Build a couple extra campaigns specifically for this audience and have these campaigns ready to deploy if this group's renewal rate is pacing below average.

#7) Consider a Quantity-Based Pricing Tier

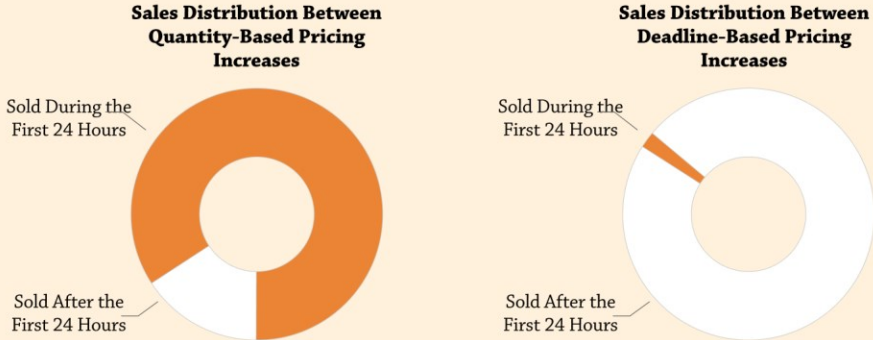
Encouraging passholders to buy sooner instead of waiting until later serves many purposes from locking in revenue for the resort to grabbing those discretionary dollars before they're spent on a competitor. If getting passholders to buy ASAP becomes more of a goal for your resort, one of the more powerful strategies is building price increases around the number of passes sold instead of a

specific date. These quantity-based deadlines are incredibly effective at getting guests to buy now.

As we mentioned earlier, about 20% of passes are typically sold during the final day leading up to a deadline-based season pass sale. What we didn't mention is that less than 1% of pass sales happen in the day immediately after pass sales begin or a new pricing window opens. However, if the resort tells their passholders that only a certain number of passes will be sold at this current price and once they're gone the price will go up, we've seen as many as 85% of total sales happen within the first day.

In other words, if you want people to buy now instead of waiting for a deadline, consider weaving aspects of a quantity-based deadline into your season pass sales strategy, even if it's just bonus perks for the first people who renew.

Deadline-based pricing increases build the most urgency right before a deadline. Quantity-based pricing increases drive sales build urgency immediately.



A Year-Round Effort

If there's one key takeaway that we want to remind you of as we wrap up this guide, it's simply that optimizing for pass renewals is a year-round effort.

Yes, season passes are usually only purchased from spring until late fall, but shoulder seasons are a perfect time to get data, reporting, and audiences squared away and mid-season is the time to be driving passholder visitation to increase the likelihood every passholder will renew once the season ends.

The more you think of improving pass renewal rates as a year-round effort, the more likely you are to have the tools, data, and odds in your favor once passes go on sale.