

More E-Mail Marketing Hints

Launching an E-Mail marketing campaign these days is not as simple as it used to be. The growing consumer frustration with spam (unwanted, unsolicited e-mail messages) makes getting the message read and a response difficult to induce. In addition, there are new laws regulating e-mail campaigns, which do not necessarily serve to restrict legitimate marketing campaigns, but does make compliance something that needs to be considered and incorporated. Finally, the technologies competing to serve as your platform and engine are making contradictory and confusing claims, leaving it up to you to make sure you are well educated in the demands of your campaign so you can properly select the technology you deploy.

While the challenges are formidable, the opportunity e-mail marketing offers makes the decision to pursue solutions that overcome the obstacles an easy one to make. Simply stated, there is no cheaper, faster or more direct way to reach a highly targeted market, nor is there an easier way to launch a viral campaign, generate leads, or provoke an instant response. Any way we look at, challenges aside, as marketers we must find ways to exploit the power and potential of e-mail.

This article offers 4 critical elements that can be included to produce and execute a highly successful e-mail marketing campaign. They are:

1. Recognize and Act According to the Notion that Customer Experience is Critical

The sending of a marketing message via e-mail does not alleviate the need to remember that all our marketing is designed to create and maintain a relationship with our customers. The use of an e-mail message, however brief and direct, can still be structured to improve our relationship and deliver to the customer an experience that is satisfactory and consistent with our brand. The e-mail needs to be structured in such a way as to appear personal and sustain interest. Certainly every e-mail can have the name of the recipient (simple technology) and a personalized offer (also not particularly complex). However, we can go even further by understanding (a) gather customer information such as e-mail address, purchase behavior, privacy preferences, and other relevant information, (b) understand the customer's needs, determine the customer's value, and provide opportunity for customer feedback, (c) create a proactive response mechanism through assurances of a robust privacy protection policy, the presentation of a customized, time sensitive offer, the opportunity for customers to present opinions and share experiences, and the ability for the customer to execute a response easily, and (d) evaluate the program through the tracking of responses, track various versions of promotional e-mails, and categorize recipients in accordance with response rates. By engaging in these steps your company will be able to superimpose your branded experience to your customers via e-mail, making your e-mail marketing a powerful extension and integrated part of your comprehensive marketing plan.

2. Never Underestimate the Centrality of the Privacy Issue

Mere promises of privacy, the posting of a firm privacy policy, and the engagement of permission marketing are all necessary steps for the establishment of a privacy policy that provides your customers with the comfort level they require in order to permit you to seek to engage them. However, these steps alone do not make for a complete privacy program that links your e-mails to your brand. Additional steps you can take include the

inclusion of a RIS (Responsible Information Stewardship) program so that information gathered and stored by the company is secured, a policy that flat-out refuses to share customer information with others, whether for sale or for the purposes of statistical analysis, providing customers access to the information the company has about them, and the ability to change or delete that information, and finally, posting evidence of your internal training and sensitivity awareness efforts as regards your employees so customers know that your claims and your actions are coordinated and genuine.

3, Take Steps to Be Known to Your Customers and Make Them Comfortable

It's very simple: the rise of spam and the abundance of marketing via e-mail is such that recipients will not open your e-mails if they do not know your company and have not been made comfortable with you (primarily as regards privacy, but also with regard to the honesty and trustworthiness of your offers). Your e-mail stands a better chance of being opened and responded to if (a) the recipient knows your company, (b) the recipient consented to receive e-mails from you, (c) the e-mail is about a product the recipient has an interest in (that is, that your targeting was on the mark), and (d) the e-mail presents something that the recipient or someone the recipient knows wants. Moreover, where you send the e-mail is connected to the comfort level, as many people prefer to engage personal e-mails at home, as opposed to work. The more personal, as opposed to work, e-mail addresses you have, the better off you'll be. Finally, comfort is also about the truthfulness of your offer. If your subject line is misleading you will be pegged as trying to fool someone. Your subject line should, instead, include your promotion. If they don't open it with the promotion as the subject line, they won't engage the promotion even if you trick them into opening the e-mail with a misleading line. Only problem is not only do you still have a potential customer not engaging your offer, but now he/she is suspicious of your tactics and will junk your e-mail next time around.

4. Continuously Try to Improve Response Rates

In opt-in e-mail campaigns it is not unusual, if you selected your targeted markets correctly and engaged the opt-in recipients properly, to garner a 10% response rate (not buy rate, but rate of people who received the e-mail and somehow or another responded). This is a pretty good response rate, especially considering that direct mail campaigns usually work with 0.5% - 3% response rate. Nonetheless, it is necessary to continually monitor and measure your response rates, extracting from the measurement process the understanding of what is working well, and what is not, and making certain that the more productive tactics and the more attractive promotions are being deployed more often, with versions of what is working being tried to refine the process and increase the response numbers.

E-mail is a powerful tool. Unfortunately this fact has not gone past the sort of shady marketers that have distorted and corrupted every exciting and productive marketing tactic. In spite of their less than honest efforts, we need to reclaim e-mail as a legitimate and wanted marketing channel, as it allows us to provide information and offers to consumers in ways that are immediate and direct. We want the access to the consumer and the consumer wants the special buy opportunities from us. We need to make certain that e-mail remains a viable channel for this mutual exchange.