

Harnessing the power of email - 10 Best practice tips for more effective email marketing

Email is one of the most powerful and cost effective marketing tools you can employ, but like any marketing activities there are techniques and principals that should be followed. We have pulled together 10 best practice tips that will help maximise the effectiveness of your marketing emails.

1. Let them know who the email is from

Your 'from' line should ideally be your company or brand name. This gives credibility and trust and aids open rates. There is no benefit from 'conning' the recipient to open by making out the email is from someone it is not. You may get open rates but in the end it is click through's you want.

2. Create a powerful subject line

Many businesses that produce marketing emails, sweat blood over the design, layout and HTML gizmo's within the email but totally forget about the importance of the subject line.

This is your first, and possibly only, chance to grab the recipients attention and stave off that delete button.

Your subject line should be brief and to the point. If you can get it into 6 words then all the better. Longer subject lines are OK, but make sure your message is conveyed in the first 50 characters as many email clients will cut off after 50 characters.

3. Be careful not to be thought of as SPAM

The subject line content is also a major component in the algorithm of many ISP and recipient-level spam filters. In other words, a poorly written subject lead may not only go unopened, it may not even reach the recipient's inbox in the first place.

Some of these are easy to avoid, any words about medical care, sex and debt for example.

The spam filters are also vigilant about words and phrases such as 'Dear friend', 'Don't delete' and 'The information you requested' and extra punctuation such as full stops in strange places, or over use of asterisks or exclamation marks.

But for many marketers legitimate subject lines that promote 'FREE', or '50% discount' are also likely to not get through or be deleted by the users as they fear SPAM. You need to think about new ways of getting across your message in a compelling way whilst avoiding the spam filters.

4. Make the most of your top line

With email preview panes, image blocking and Outlook's auto preview your first line could be the only thing your recipient sees before deciding whether to delete or open the email. So don't waste this opportunity with a negative statement such as "Having trouble viewing this message? Click here to view it on our Web site."

Give them a reason to scroll down or open and think about your best selling features or main offer

5. The power of personalisation

Direct marketers have known for years that the more you personalise a direct mail pack, the better the response rate (assuming your personalisation is correct!). So why do so many email marketers send out generic, un-personalised emails?

If you are emailing a customer or subscriber, they expect you to know their name and use it. Personalisation within an email is simple and should always be included.

6. Have multiple click through points

You cannot assume that the recipient will read through your email before clicking on the action button at the bottom of the email. You should put as many click through points as possible in the email to capture the maximum amount of response.

Many emails duplicate the web site navigation across the top and this can be effective. Also, vary the click through end-points, it doesn't always need to go to your home page. If it is a specific product, then go to that order page or you could set up a specific landing web page.

7. Improve your call to actions

Lose the generic action button. Instead of "click here," use descriptive terms such as "Order now" or "subscribe" or "Get white paper here." Be explicit about the actions you want users to take.

8. Better use of auto-responder emails

Setting up auto-responder and triggered emails is simple, and a great marketing opportunity that many businesses overlook. They can be scheduled to happen at set times after email subscription for example so can be used for marketing messages.

For example, if you provide a free newsletter, you could setup 3 auto responders for new subscribers: the first is sent 1 hour after they subscribe. It contains a thank you message and a link to get 10% off your newly released e-Book. The second is sent 24 hours after they subscribe, telling them about your community message boards, and the third is sent 72 hours after they subscribe, in which you can offer them a special deal on becoming a paid member of your site.

9. Work out the best time of day to send

There are no hard and fast rules about when to send an email, and it does depend to some extent on who the email is aimed at, a consumer or business, or whether the offer time sensitive or not?

Broadly it is best to avoid broadcasting overnight to businesses as they sit in the inbox and when that person comes to their desk, the first thing they do is clear their emails which usually means deleting marketing messages.

Monday's and Fridays should also be avoided for B2B, but a Friday can be very effective for consumer emails. Mornings are better than afternoons for B2B as people haven't had as much time to be distracted by the events of the day.

10. How often is too often?

One of the most common questions asked is, 'How often should I email my list?' Not surprisingly there is no definitive answer. Just as there is no one answer to how many times you should be in contact with your customers, or broadcast your TV ad. It depends on who it is going to, what you are trying to achieve and the subject matter.

For some businesses once a week is fine, for others it would be seen as bombardment. At the other extreme, I have known very successful email programmes that were daily!

As with most marketing exercises, the best approach is to test frequency monitoring your open, click-through and unsubscribe rates. Most companies could easily increase the frequency of their email programmes.

If you would like to speak to us about setting up or improving your email programme

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