

5 PRACTICES TO PERFECT YOUR EMAIL EFFECTIVENESS



Are you aware that on average, consumers receive 416 commercial emails per month?^a Your customers want to be treated uniquely and feel that they have an established relationship with you. The days of blast and batch emails are long over. Now, the tendency for customers that receive generic, unfocused marketing messages is to hit the delete key without ever opening your email. You need to give the recipient a reason to open your email.

You've heard a lot about building relationships and loyalty, but you need to know how. How do you build that relationship, maintain it and nurture it so that it will grow? How do you create positive buzz about your products and services so that your customers will brag about their success with your product to their colleagues? How do you increase your word of mouth and referral business? How do you increase your ROI? This white paper addresses five key concepts that can help you accomplish these goals. These concepts include:

- Properly targeting and managing your customer list
- Creating and sending content that is relevant and interesting
- Engaging customers in a timely manner with a frequency that works
- Seamlessly offering the ability to view content on any device
- Analyzing your deliverability and campaign effectiveness in order to continually improve the other four

In today's highly competitive marketplace—where companies are vying for the consumers' inboxes, attention and business—what can you as a marketer do to not only get people to opt-in to receive your emails, but get them to open and act on them?

TARGET YOUR CUSTOMER LIST

Every business has several types of customers who have different needs at different times. If you create emails and send them to your entire list, what are the chances that you are sending a powerful message that will resonate with *all* of them? Probably very slim. Targeting or segmenting your list allows you to organize your list members into different groupings based on your marketing messages to maximize the effectiveness of your mailings. If you're not targeting, you dilute the impact of your messaging—your emails become uninspiring because they reach everyone on your list, at the cost of individual relevancy. Stop diluting your email content and send something really focused and valuable.

The key to good targeting is based on two main factors: demographic information (who your customers are) and behavioral data (how they've interacted with you in the past).

Demographic information is the information they have shared with you. Examples include: their location, income bracket, age range, gender and title (depending on whether you are targeting B2B

or B2C customers). Behavioral data is the information you have gathered based on past behaviors and transactions, such as what purchases they have made, links they have clicked in previous mailings and how often they have interacted with you or your business. It is imperative that your demographic and behavioral information is up to date to ensure you are reaching the right person with the right message. While big data has been an industry buzzword for some time now, smart use of big data enables you to have a significantly more targeted and effective sales approach. This way, you can approach your customer communication in a completely different way.

By leveraging the behavioral data collected from your email campaigns, you can create campaigns that have greater relevance to your target audience. Engaging in this manner will enable you to maintain a strong list and help grow it too, because you are influencing your current subscribers to share the information that you've given them with other colleagues in their organization. These people can then be added as new subscribers to your list (providing they opt-in, of course).

Maintaining a strong, well-targeted list is crucial to your overall success.

Targeting often means you are much less likely to get spam complaints and unsubscribes because you are sending information that is relevant to the customer receiving it. Minimizing your complaint and unsubscription rates is very important, as these are deliverability metrics that help measure the success of your campaigns. High spam complaints and unsubscribes can negatively impact your reputation score, which in turn affects your deliverability.

CREATE VALUABLE CONTENT

Let's begin with a solid definition of what content marketing is:

“Content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.” ~contentmarketinginstitute.com

According to Roper Public Affairs^b, eighty percent of business decision makers prefer to get company information in a series of articles versus advertisements. Seventy percent say content marketing makes them feel closer to the sponsoring company, while sixty percent say that company content helps them make better product decisions.

Think of this – what if your customers looked forward to receiving your marketing? What if when they receive it, via print, email, website, they spend between 15-45 minutes consuming it?

As a marketer, this approach should be exciting news to you. Traditional ads and offers provide less value to your customers than providing them with information they can actually use. The content should be user-focused; clear, simple and concise; and fill in knowledge gaps. A “did you know?” series may resonate with your subscribers much more than a discount offer on a product you have presented to them numerous times in the past.

So here's the sticky wicket: how can you create content that is relevant to *all* of your customers? If it's relevant to everyone, then chances are your message is watered down and, therefore, not particularly valuable. If your content doesn't provide value, then what is the point of sending it to your customers? You will only serve to land your email communication in the trash folder or worse – an unsubscription or a spam complaint.

The best way to get your rock star content into the right hands is by tweaking your message for different segments of your customer/prospect list. As discussed in the previous section, by sending the tweaked content to the appropriate subset of your list, you will be delivering wanted, needed content that your recipient is looking forward to receiving. Delivering good content allows you the opportunity to build trust with your customers.



Figure 1 – Content goals within your content marketing strategy to convert visitors into evangelists
<http://zzizzlmedia.com/insights/content-marketings-winning-drive/>

There are multiple ways to deliver personalized, relevant content to your recipients. One method is to create content dynamically. Unlike static content, dynamic content allows you to easily swap out sections of your email to fit the needs of your different targets. This method allows you to use the same campaign across segments with relevant messages for each. It simplifies the sending of your campaign and gets much higher ROI because you are giving your recipients information they can use without having to create multiple individual campaigns.

ENGAGE IN A TIMELY MANNER

So, what's next? You have a great list that has been sliced and diced according to the needs of your audience. You have great content that your customers and prospects are excited to get because it is relevant and informative. Now you need to explore how often you should be sending your emails. Properly engaging your subscribers is the key to conversion. You don't want to over-send, because they may stop engaging if you inundate them with too much mail. Worse, you may cause them to unsubscribe. They lose interest if you over engage. Yet, you want to be sure that you are sending to them often enough so that they are not under engaged. So what's the happy medium? We suggest that you create a mailing schedule based on the engagement levels of your subscribers.

There are two basic types of emails: batch and transactional. Transactional mailings are those that are automatically triggered because of an action your customer took. For example, they may have subscribed to your list, made a purchase on your site or filled out an online form. These emails should be sent out on a timely basis (preferably immediately) because your customer is expecting them; and should follow an 80/20 rule. Eighty percent of the content should relate directly to the transaction while the other twenty percent can provide other information. This ratio is in keeping to the stringent CAN-SPAM rules.

Transactional mailings, from a campaign perspective, can and should be automated—a “set it and forget it” approach. Specific triggers, based on different actions, are used to launch email within the campaign. An example you are already familiar with, is the confirmation email you receive when a product is ordered; an interim email alerting you as to when your item will ship; another email when the item ships; and, a thank you email or survey after your item has arrived. This entire process can and should be automated, which minimizes how much time you spend on the campaign and maximizes your interaction with the customer.

Batch mailings, on the other hand, are the messages that are sent to your targeted groups with the specific, relevant content that was discussed in the previous section. It would be great if there were a hard and fast rule about how often to send email content to your subscriber. The rules are different from industry to industry and from subscriber to subscriber. Even within the same list! While one person might want an email from you every day, another might be happier with once a week. Determining the best frequency is accomplished through thorough testing and subscriber feedback. Asking subscribers for their preferences ensures that you are not overburdening them with your email. You can use these preferences as part of your segmentation. This is part of the personal relationship you create with your subscribers in order to increase their engagement and, in turn, their conversion.

Simply stated, conversion is the number of actions taken by your subscriber divided by the number of emails that they received from your campaign. Typically, conversion rates are between 0.2% and 7% with many companies averaging around 5%. Though the factors affecting conversion rates vary drastically, Daniel Burstein, from Marketing Sherpa says, “There is no such thing as the ‘right’ conversion rate. There are too many variables that affect conversion to settle on one number.” Some of these variables include: type of industry, new vs. returning visitors, current marketing campaigns, your competitors’ marketing campaigns, price points, etc.^c

In addition to your transactional mailing and your batch mailings, you should also measure your re-engagement strategy. Just because you haven't heard from a subscriber in six months, doesn't mean you will never hear from them again. A re-engagement campaign uses email to remind your subscribers that you are still committed to providing them with products and services that suit their needs. Automated campaigns are a great tool for re-engagement because you have the ability to create decision trees based on actions (or non-actions) that your subscriber might take, sending email to them appropriately.

Another great way to share your content is by using email to point your subscribers to information you have already shared in your other channels. Email is a very powerful and effective component of a multi-channel engagement strategy. It's a unique channel due to its crossover with web, mobile, and social. Without making email the center of your engagement strategy, your content is sitting in these various channels, potentially in a static state. Email allows the individual channels to work in concert with one another as opposed to each channel existing as its own silo. A multi-channel marketing strategy, with email at the core, ensures that your content is shared across channels. Additionally, you get to repurpose your content without duplicating your efforts.

Taking advantage of transactional mailings, batch mailings, re-engagement campaigns and multi-channel engagement, offers you multiple opportunities to reach out to your customers in a meaningful way. All of these strategies will build that trusting relationship you desire because you are sharing relevant information, instead of the same old offers and discount type of mailings that customers are accustomed to receiving.

OPTIMIZE FOR MOBILE

There has been a fundamental paradigm shift in how society is interacting with technology. Pew Research Center claims that 56% of all adults in the U.S. have a smartphone. This number is up from 35% just two years ago. And the trend is continuing. In the 18-34-age range the smartphone ownership percentage

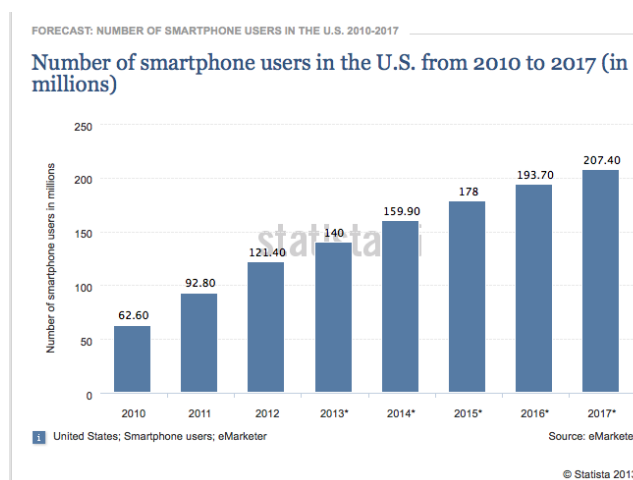


Figure 2 – Smartphone infiltration forecast in the U.S. 2010-2017 <http://www.statista.com/statistics/201182/forecast-of-smartphone-users-in-the-us/>

is 80% and for those earning over \$75,000/year that percentage is 90%.^d Therefore, because of widespread and increasing adoption, marketers should not think in terms of email messages created expressly for mobile versus non-mobile users.

All email needs to be optimized for a wide variety of devices. At any given time of day or night, your subscribers may be reading email on any one of their devices—including desktops, laptops, smart phones, and tablets. The forecast for connected devices shows a marked increase in the mobile sector (smartphones/tablets) and a decline in the PC sector (desktops/laptops), making it all the more imperative that email dynamically displays properly despite the device it's viewed on.

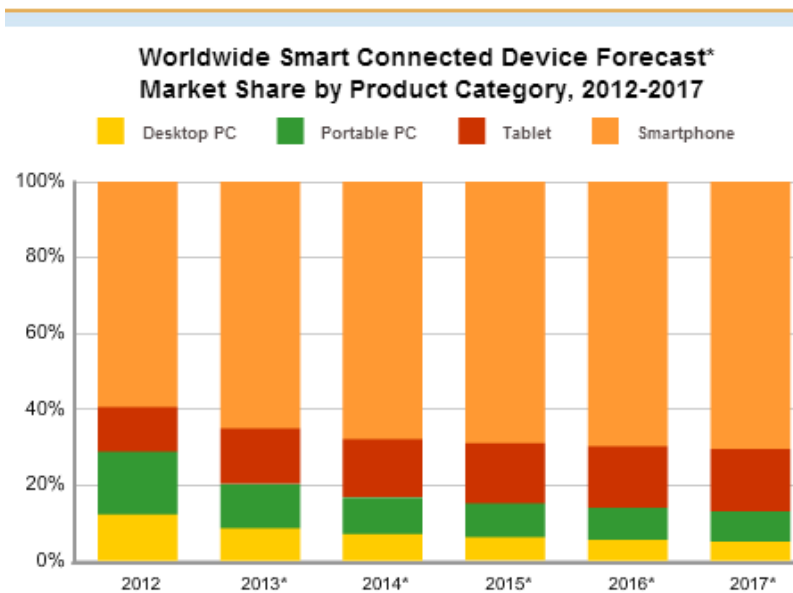


Figure 3 – Connected device market share forecast – 2012-2017 <http://www.forbes.com/sites/louiscolombus/2013/09/12/idc-87-of-connected-devices-by-2017-will-be-tablets-and-smartphones/>

How can you, as a marketer, be sure your emails are always being seen in the best possible light? Let's focus on three things you can do to improve your open rate on mobile devices.

Responsive design is a crucial element. Simply stated, responsive design is a design approach that optimizes your email and web content so that it renders correctly regardless of the device your recipient is using, thereby providing an optimal viewing experience. As more and more emails are opened on mobile devices, you should adapt your messaging to this channel; thereby optimizing the viewer experience for recipients with varying devices.

Here's an example of how content created with a responsive design approach looks on three different devices. The content you see on the three different devices, below, is the same content and is being dynamically altered per media device.



Figure 4 – Dynamic content, courtesy of mashable.com, as rendered on three different devices <http://www.underworldmagazines.com/responsive-web-design-primary-tools-and-resources-for-raising-a-high-resolution-website/>

Another important consideration regarding your mobile users is the subject line and the first line of your email content. On mobile devices, unlike laptops or desktops, email clients often show two to three lines of text. This gives you an opportunity to provide additional information to your subscriber, so use this space wisely.

Subject lines should be short and sweet. Your subscribers will give about two seconds' worth of attention to the inbox view, making it vitally important to get to the point immediately in your subject and first line or risk losing them. If this content isn't strong, you face the possibility of your subscribers not opening your email. Too often, the first line of the email may say something mundane like, "click here to view in browser." This is not going to excite your audience.

Making your content mobile accessible matters, too. Using mobile-friendly responsive email templates allows you to not only scale the presentation of the email, but to also scale your content so that the most salient pieces of your message are displayed to your mobile user. It is also important to keep your calls to action to a minimum. If there are too many places to go in an email to take action, you potentially keep your subscriber from taking any action. Short and sweet – this is a rule of thumb to follow for all your content, not just your subject line.

ANALYZE DELIVERABILITY

There are multiple challenges associated with email deliverability. To ensure high deliverability and a solid reputation with ISPs, following some simple guidelines will greatly enhance your deliverability rate. The good news is that by following the practices outlined above, you are already well on your way to higher deliverability.

Some of the tactics associated with better deliverability are:

- Ensure that email lists focus on the quality of subscribers over quantity
- Target customers to reduce spam complaints
- Optimize for various devices
- Utilize opt-in opportunities
- Update subscribed email addresses when employee turnover occurs
- Determine if a dedicated or a shared IP is the right fit for your company
- Dedicate time for testing and analyzing email campaigns

Since many of these have already been discussed, let's focus on high turnover in the B2B market, dedicated vs. shared IP, and testing and analytics.

Turnover in the B2B market

Are you aware that the average professional employee stays at a job between 3.2 – 4.6 years?^e If you extrapolate that out by one year, your list is approximately 25% out of date. If you have an outdated list, then you will have a much higher bounce rate; which, as previously mentioned, is a measurable deliverability metric. The higher your bounce rate, the lower your reputation score will be. One method for reducing the bounce rate would be to delete those invalid email addresses. However, if you'd like to recapture this 25%, it's recommended that you follow up on bounced email addresses. This strategy offers you two opportunities to gain new subscribers. First, you can do some research to find out who replaced the former employee; and, second, you may be able to follow that former employee to their new job and potentially create a whole new opportunity.

Dedicated vs. Shared IP address

When deciding whether to use a dedicated versus shared IP address, what you are really considering is your sending reputation. Using a shared IP has some inherent risks as your reputation is intrinsically linked to the reputation and sending practices of the other organizations that are on the same IP address as you. Conversely, a dedicated IP address means that you and your reputation are on your own. You can be your own best friend or worst enemy, depending on the quality of your email.

If you are new to email marketing, you have to build your reputation. If you are on a good, shared IP with other good senders, and are using an ESP that adheres to compliance best practices, you may actually be better off using a shared IP. A shared IP is very attractive from a financial perspective, since it is normally more affordable than a dedicated IP address.

However, if you are a high volume sender and you can afford the additional expense of having a dedicated IP address then it is money well spent. Industries that are likely to be phished, such as banks or other financial institutions or businesses that need to use SSL should also be using a dedicated IP as it grants a much greater level of security and control.

Testing and Analytics

Taking the time to test your email campaigns before deployment, and analyzing the details of each email within a campaign (as well as the campaign itself), will give you extremely important and relevant information you can use to hone future campaigns. A/B split testing, built-in reporting and web analytics are all tools you can study to improve your deliverability.

One tool that allows you to send the best emails possible is A/B/n split testing. The concept behind split testing is that it allows you to change specific elements of your message without changing the content. For example, you can try out different subject lines or whom the email is sent from (called a “mail from” address). You can also split test based on the scheduled delivery time. You can even use two completely different templates with the same content. A/B testing allows you to send a portion of your email to one group and another portion to another group. For example, you can opt to send 10% of your email to group A and 10% to group B. Your email marketing tool will look at the performance of each of those sends, declare a winner, and send the remaining 80% to the better performing split.

Of course there are many analytical tools available after the mailing has gone out. Your email marketing tool should provide you with details such as: total open and clickthrough rates, unique open and clickthrough rates, and even heat map functionality (which allows you to see where in an email your subscribers are clicking). When you have calls to action in multiple places in an email, it's important to know which one is performing the best. These details allow you to better manage your list, reassess your targets, understand what content is engaging your subscribers and what devices they are viewing email on.

Analyzing this data and taking a good look at your campaigns should be very revealing. It is easy to keep doing things the way they have been done in the past, but times change, consumers become savvier and their expectations rise as their level of sophistication rises.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of how your business has used email marketing in the past, it is clear that relationships built on loyalty inevitably lead to an increase in ROI. This white paper has focused on five practices that help you and your business build, maintain and nurture relationships through the creation of email campaigns that your customers are interested in engaging with. The bottom line is email should function as the backbone of your marketing strategy. Email is not going anywhere any time soon and will always be the workhorse of your online marketing.

Net Atlantic is dedicated to providing you with an email marketing platform that will serve your needs today, tomorrow and into the future. We are committed to providing superior products and professional services to our customers. Please visit us at www.netatlantic.com or call us at (877)263-8285 to find out how we can help you meet your email marketing objectives.

Your customer receives 416 commercial emails per month. Don't you want yours to be the ones they open?

^a <http://www.marketingcharts.com/wp/topics/email/average-email-subscriber-gets-416-commercial-messages-per-month-36280/>

^b <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/>

^c <http://www.marketingexperiments.com/blog/marketing-insights/average-conversion-rates.html>

^d <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markrogowsky/2013/06/06/more-than-half-of-us-have-smartphones-giving-apple-and-google-much-to-smile-about/>

^e <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/careerdevelopment/qt/stay-at-a-job.htm>