



How to Make your Email Campaigns More Relevant

By Megan Ouellet, Director of Marketing • Listrak, LLC • February 22, 2007

In the past few years, preference-based email marketing has become an essential part of many companies' overall direct marketing strategies. Marketers know that there is no easier way to reach their target audience as email marketing gives them the tools they need to reach all of their customers and members at once. Marketers can send out hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of emails with the click of a button and deliver their messages to recipients in an effective, non-disruptive way.

While this is a good tool to have, if it is not used properly it may do more harm than good. Recipients won't respond unless they are interested in the message. Or worse, they could opt-out of the list altogether or even report the message as spam if they are inundated with irrelevant messages.

Recent studies show that targeted messages that are relevant to customers may increase net profits averaging 18 times over more general broadcast communications. There are a number of things email marketers can do to make email campaigns more relevant to the recipients. This white paper discusses, in detail, the changes marketers can implement to increase the relevancy of their email campaigns to boost customer response, sales, and satisfaction.

Build Credibility and Trust by Delivering the Right Information

Relevant, preference-based email campaigns begin with the registration process. The opt-in web page should ask for more than just a name and email address field. Easy to use check-boxes can quickly capture the interests of the subscribers – such as product preferences and preferred delivery method, as well as important user information – such as gender, age, and location. Marketers must make the sign up process quick and easy in order to gain as many subscribers as possible.

Marketers should let recipients know in advance what to expect in terms of the frequency and content mix. Marketers should tell the subscribers what privacy policies are in place, how to opt-out or change preferences, and how to contact the company if any problems or questions arise. If possible, marketers should allow the recipient to choose how often they receive information. It is also a good idea to provide copies of past email newsletters or other campaigns so subscribers have a clear understanding of the type of correspondence they will receive. That way, the subscribers know what to expect and they look forward to receiving the information.

After the subscriber opts-in to receive email correspondence, a welcome email should be sent immediately. The welcome email should have the corporate branding in place so subscribers will be able to identify that future emails are coming from a credible and reliable source. Customers might not remember signing up for an email list, but if they recognize a brand that they know and trust, and if the information interests them, they will be more likely to open, read, and respond to the message positively.

Segment the Database

To effectively create a segmented database, marketers must gather consistent information from every customer or member that signs up to receive email communications. This way, the database fields remain the same, which allows marketers to notice trends and track results across multiple campaigns. This, in turn, gives marketers the tools they need to create more relevant email messages.

Segmenting the database through subscriber attributes will give the marketer a very clear understanding of each individual subscriber. Instead of grouping subscribers through one attribute that they have in common, marketers can manipulate the database to build groups based on many different attri-

butes that match the targeted email campaign. Not only does this reassure that the marketer is reaching the correct subscribers for each campaign, it also helps the marketer reach subscribers that might have been left out of a list that was previously compiled.

The more details and customer attributes a marketer can capture in the segmented database, the more relevant the emails will be to the customers as the information directly reflects their interests and purchase habits. To get a clear understanding of customer behavior, marketers should track items such as open, read, click through, and conversion rates and purchase history in the segmented database along with the preferences. Doing so will give marketers valuable customer-centric knowledge and will help them know and understand each customer's individual habits.

To build even greater segmented customer profiles, marketers may integrate a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool or web analytics with their email marketing software. CRM will provide sales forecasting tools so marketers may target subscribers with accuracy and tailor the email campaign accordingly. Web analytics will give marketers detailed information on subscribers' website viewing habits. For example, a subscriber may click through the email campaign to arrive at the landing page, and from there, he or she may click through to the company's website. While it is important for companies to know which subscribers are viewing their sites, they can use web analytics to find out which pages the subscriber visited, which links were utilized, and what information was downloaded. Knowing this information prior to sending an email campaign will boost campaign performance as the emails contain information that is more pertinent to the subscribers.

Use Customer Preferences to Drive Campaigns

One of the biggest mistakes email marketers make is deploy-

ing the same or similar content to their entire customer list week after week and expecting it to perform well over time. The purpose of this document and the reason why relevancy is so crucial is that people lose interest in things as time passes. If the content is not meaningful to subscribers and if it doesn't speak to them in a way that will impact their lives then it isn't relevant and it won't be opened, read, or converted into a sale. It is crucial for email marketers to make sure that the content they are providing is relevant to their audience. Doing so will ensure that performance metrics, such as open rates and click through rates, grow over time.

A good example of a company that is getting relevancy right is VinterActive LLC. VinterActive integrated its Ecommerce sites with Listrak's email marketing to create a powerful online marketing tool for the wine industry. VinterActive captures customers' preferences in several ways – either manually during events at the wineries, in the winery at kiosks set up to allow customers to sign up as they shop, and online at the wineries' websites during the sales process. VinterActive then uses the segmented information to send customized email campaigns to customers that have shown interest in receiving news about certain topics.

The success that VinterActive has with its targeted, preference-based email campaigns is astounding. It boasts an average open rate of nearly 30 percent, a click through rate averaging 15 to 25 percent, and an average response rate that is 250 percent higher than the response generated from more general email campaigns. With an average sale of \$200, it has achieved its return on investment many times over.

Bryan St. Amant, founder of VinterActive, says, "With us, it's all about preference. If the initial email matches the customer's preferences, and each consecutive email matches their preferences, open and read rates will stay strong for the long haul. If the content is not what the customer is interested in,

they won't be as inclined to open the next message you send them."

Be Consistent

Another way to increase the relevancy of an email campaign is to send information on a regular basis. It is important to set expectations up front by telling customers how many emails they will receive within a certain time frame, and it is even more important to adhere to that schedule. Sending out important information on a regular basis will make the information appear much more relevant and valid to customers than if the emails are sent randomly.

Many email marketers have difficulty determining the correct schedule for sending email campaigns. A weekly email might seem like a good idea at first as it gives marketers a way to increase the visibility of their brands. And while this might work for the first few weeks, it is challenging to come up with new and interesting information to send out at such an aggressive rate. At the same time, scheduling monthly emails will ensure that the information is fresh and new, but it might not be enough to hold the attention of the customers.

Before marketers determine the schedule, they must look closely at many different factors, and the calendar should not be one of them. Marketers should not make the decision to send email campaigns based on days or weeks or months. Marketers should make the decision based on their customer's preferences, upcoming events, inventory levels, and other unique factors of their individualized business.

After marketers determine what information to send, the segmented database can help them determine the correct delivery schedule. Some customers might want a detailed email sent to them weekly while others may want a quarterly update. Knowing the customer preferences will really help the

marketer deliver relevant information to the right customer at the right time.

However, it's not enough just to send email campaigns out on a consistent basis. Marketers must also be consistent with the branding and overall design of the email campaign in order to increase the relevancy of email communications. Having a similar look and feel to every correspondence builds the brand and identity of the corporation to the subscribers, and this is especially important to small to mid-size companies and start ups.

Many email marketing solutions, like Listrak, offer template design features that allow email templates to be created once, saved, and reused as needed. This function saves the marketer a lot of time and hassle when designing campaigns, and it ensures that the look and branding remain at the center of each and every campaign.

Test Formatting to Increase Deliverability

Testing the format of email campaigns before sending them to customers is a very easy thing to do, yet it is often overlooked by many marketers. Testing a campaign in different email clients will show marketers exactly how the emails will look to their customers. If an email has missing graphics and broken links, customers will know that very little time went into creating the message, and, therefore, they could feel that the message itself is unimportant. However, a well designed, branded, clear, concise email will appear more relevant as it will be obvious that the sender took a lot of time and care in developing the message.

When performing tests in different email clients, be sure to actually send the message, don't just preview it. Often times the message will look fine in the preview pane but it will be delivered incorrectly.

Marketers may also choose to test different subject lines, graphics, or text to see which campaign generates the more responses and is, therefore, the most relevant message to send to subscribers. To perform an A/B Split test, marketers must first select a small amount of test subjects, typically five to ten percent of the total list size. The marketer then creates two or three separate email campaigns using different subject lines, different headlines, different body text, configuration, call to action, and different graphics.

After sending the emails, marketers must carefully track the results, paying close attention to the number of click through rates and conversions each campaign generated. The marketer will then know without doubt which campaign to send to the rest of the list in order to reach the most subscribers.

Track Results

Even if the campaign isn't tested through an A/B Split, it is imperative that marketers track the results of each campaign as it will help them build more relevant messages in the future.

Marketers need to look at more than just the number of sales that an email campaign generated. While that is important information to have, marketers need to look further and track the individual customer that made a purchase. Also, marketers should look at the customers that clicked through the email to the website but didn't make purchases at that time. This shows that the customer had an interest in the product and the marketer can use that information to possibly upsell the customer in the future.

Marketers should also look at the customers that didn't respond to the message. If a customer opened and read a message but didn't react, it shows that the customer still has interest in the company and products but it wasn't the right

time to make a purchase. If a customer opened but didn't read a message, or if the customer deleted the message without opening it, it could mean that the email was delivered at the wrong time for the customer, or that the customer has lost interest. Marketers can use this information in the future to try a new approach that will recapture the customer's attention.

In the end, the marketer has built well established, personal relationships with each customer that will significantly increase sales and ROI.

About Listrak

Listrak is a leading provider of hosted email marketing software, allowing permission-based marketers to manage, send, track and grow their email marketing investment. We deliver email marketing intelligence through our intuitive web-based application. Leading marketers have come to rely on this intelligence to better manage email in their multi-channel marketing mix.

Listrak software helps companies, agencies and associations better manage customer relations in their marketing campaigns. Its web-enabled interface helps marketers engage their customers using an advanced profiling and personalization engine. Listrak's world-class support and professional services assist clients with enterprise integration. Its clients include L'Oreal, Motorola, Jeep, Pearle Vision, PR Newswire, The Islands of the Bahamas, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

To learn more about the many ways Listrak can strengthen your email marketing campaigns, or to sign up for a 20-minute web-based tour, visit www.listrak.com.