EMAIL MARKETING: EVOLVING IN A SOCIAL WORLD

[Chapter 10 – Digital Minds v2]

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Introduction

While there are a myriad of ways individuals receive their information, email continues to be the tool used by nearly everyone. Consumers across the world use email to connect with their favorite brands and companies in order to get updates and save money with coupons and offers. Additionally, email marketing campaigns are an effective way to reach consumers on their mobile devices.

An email marketing campaign is versatile enough to provide direct information to your customer base, while still being able to be integrated into other marketing efforts. By learning how to engage your customers through a well-developed email marketing campaign, you will continue to grow your brand presence and begin to see an increase in conversions.

Doing It Right: Best Practices for Email Marketing

Email marketing continues to be one of the most effective ways of connecting with your audience because it gives you substantial reach, flexibility, and full control of your messaging. However, many brands continue to misuse email marketing by holding onto the *email blast* mentality. Gone are the days of blasting a single message out to your entire database of contacts. In today's digital landscape, email marketing is all about creating targeted and useful content that your customers look forward to receiving.

Creating Killer Campaigns with Targeted Strategies

One of the biggest mistakes made by marketing professionals is to send email communications to their customers without a plan. Building a campaign with strategies targeted for each of your customer segments can mean the difference between creating a conversion and finding your email in the trash bin.

To design a campaign for your specific brand, begin with a goal. Are you looking to build your email list? Are you trying to drive sales for a specific product or service? Do you want to build brand awareness with your potential customer base, so they know to turn to you when they are ready to buy? By understanding your goals, you can tailor your campaign and know when you have successfully hit the mark.

Strategies for creating killer email marketing campaigns can be broken down into three categories – content, offers, and relationship building. Ideally, the perfect campaign will incorporate all of these.

Content

Content has become a buzzword tossed around constantly, and because of its prevalence, many marketers have begun to forget *why* it is so important. Creating exceptional original content positions you as an expert in your industry and provides the opportunity for your customers to add value to their network by sharing your content. Simply put, great sharable content makes your customers look good to the colleagues, friends, and family within their network. Who doesn't love that?

While creating content is essential, it does little for brand development and driving sales if there is not a strategy in place to deliver the content in a way that gives your company a solid ROI. Sharing some of your content publicly gives your customers a taste of the valuable information you have created. Keeping the remainder of this information behind an *information wall* gives your brand the opportunity to capture essential information from, or interact with, an otherwise anonymous visitor. For the first interaction with this customer, acquiring their opt-in information, such as their name and email address, is key for your list building initiative. Opportunities continue to unfold with each additional request for access to your content, and you can begin to look for deeper information insights or even social media shares.

Offers

Offers can be a wildly effective way of providing value to the customer, but they also run the risk of coming across as overly "salesy." By shifting your message away from a direct sales approach and embracing a helpful voice, you can become a trusted friend who is helping to solve a problem or address a void. Providing a strong value proposition gives your potential customers a solid reason to buy and leaves them thankful that you were able to provide the solution. With each conversion driven by your offer, you have the opportunity to glean additional insights into your customers' needs.

Relationship Building

Relationship building takes your email marketing campaign to the next level. Your brand has created original content that your customers are regularly sharing with their network. You have provided offers to drive sales conversions and attain customer opt-in information. Now, it is essential to learn more about your customer. By asking them to take a survey or provide additional information on their preferences and interests, you are communicating that you care about their needs. Additionally, by sharing information about your brand, you build a stronger emotional connection. Be a person, not a brand. Let your customers understand your values and communicate how your beliefs drive your brand. It is important to note, however, that by sharing your values and beliefs, you risk alienating those with conflicting beliefs. Therefore, it may not be a good idea to share beliefs that are potentially controversial.

Giving Your Customers What They Want: Personalization and Customization

The top reason consumers opt-out or unsubscribe from email lists is irrelevant messages. With the near constant flow of information consumers are fed each day, it's become even more essential to provide personalized and customized email messages for your customers. Consumers want to know that you are targeting them for a reason, and that your product or service adds value to their current situation.

Understand your customer by developing buyer personas

Buyer personas are theoretical insights into the ideal customer for a brand, and these personas take into account the different types of customers to be targeted. Developing these personas provides insights into the customer and assists in segmenting your larger database. To develop

each buyer persona, consider demographics, job level and seniority, daily life experiences, common life challenges, values, goals, where they acquire their information, and experience expectations.

Get a head start on developing your personas by downloading our guide, *How to Create Buyer Personas* at this link: www.wsiworld.com/buyer-personas.

Consider how to identify each buyer persona

Now that you understand each buyer persona, it is important to consider how to identify each of them. Can their job title, income level, age, or specific interests identify them? By understanding how to efficiently identify each buyer persona, the marketing professional is able to ask the right questions in a concise way on opt-in forms. This way, as customers opt-in for your newsletter or email marketing campaign, you are able to place each individual into his or her appropriate segment list.

A customer login provides the opportunity for more in-depth data points

By prompting your customers to create an account prior to checking out or making an appointment, the company is able to acquire significant amounts of permission-based data. Consumers are often willing to provide additional information about their interests, habits, and preferences in exchange for being contacted, as long as they understand the goal is to provide them with relevant information. Just imagine the impact of a beauty company sending new fair complexion makeup offers solely to the women in their database with fair skin and blue or green eyes.

Incorporate all accessible information into your marketing database

All too often, marketing departments do not have continual interaction with other departments in the company. However, the sales department may have invaluable insights into the customer base. Many sales-based companies utilize customer relationship management (CRM) software to track and organize information on customers' buying habits and company interactions. Often, the CRM databases can be incorporated into the marketing database. By understanding whether the consumer contacted customer service or inquired about a specific product, the marketing department is able to further customize their messaging to that customer.

Craft personalized messages for each segmented list

The language you use and the offers you highlight will change for each segment. Ask yourself what is most important to each segment, and address those needs specifically.

Use dynamic tags to further personalize the message

We have all received an email marketing communication with our names in it, and we're all aware that no one is manually inputting those names into each email. However, dynamic tags can be much richer and more useful than including someone's first name. Consider using

dynamic tags for any of the information stored in your database. If the company's CRM system is integrated into your marketing database, you could send targeted emails thanking the customer for downloading a particular whitepaper or speaking with a specific agent in the customer service department.

Don't Alienate Your Mobile Readers:
Tips & Tricks for Mobile-Friendly Campaigns

These days, if something doesn't happen instantly and on-demand, it doesn't happen at all! In a survey[1] conducted by Constant Contact, it was reported that 75% of smartphone owners are likely to delete emails that are not easily read on their mobile devices.[i] A huge portion of our population reads their emails from their smartphones or tablets. However, many brands fail to cater to the on-the-go consumer with mobile friendly email campaigns.

Here are some important tips for making your email campaign more compatible with mobile.

Compose short and concise subject lines

Less of the subject line gets displayed on a mobile device. Since your subject line is the headline of your email, keep it to 40 characters or less.

Put the most important information up front

Consumers are more likely to skim through your email while they are viewing it on a mobile device. Be sure they see the most important information. Put it up front and use sub-headlines to call out specific points.

Use a single column template

Most email marketing tools have responsive templates designed to work with mobile devices. However, sticking with a single column template helps with easy readability with all email clients.

Enjoy the white space

White space is a natural way to break up text, increase readability, and frame the content in your email. Use white space in your email to ensure it looks clean and uncluttered.

Use larger fonts

Readability is the most important element of a mobile friendly email. Using larger fonts helps with readability on smaller screens. Remember, your customers are likely reading in a less than ideal situation while on the go.

Incorporate a strong and clearly visible call to action

There should be one clear call to action for mobile viewing. Remember that a finger has much less accuracy than a mouse when clicking on a screen, so creating a large call to action button

works best on mobile. Use an accent color to make it clearly visible. If you choose to use an image for the call to action, be sure you use clear ALT text, in case the image doesn't load. This ALT text should include direct language such as "Click Here."

Optimize your imagery and use appropriate ALT text

A good rule of thumb for all email marketing campaigns, is taking slow download speeds into account. This is especially important for mobile-friendly email campaigns. Use limited but valuable images to break up text and add visual appeal. Responsive coding will help with the size of your images, if it is available to you. Otherwise, try shrinking the images by 50% and then compressing them at a slightly higher compression rate. Remember, not all email clients automatically download images from new sources, so using appropriate ALT text with your images is essential if you want your email to still make an impact in an instance when the images don't load.

Have a clean hierarchy and design

Using headlines, font sizes, and colored text, you can create a clear hierarchy for your email. Use this to walk the reader through your email and show them exactly how you want the information consumed.

Don't forget to test your email on multiple devices

Anyone who has transitioned between their Outlook program and their Gmail account knows that each email client displays emails differently. The same goes for mobile devices. Be sure to test your email on multiple devices to ensure that it displays correctly. If you don't have access to multiple devices, look for services that offer device testing for you.

Lead your customer to mobile-friendly conversion sites

If your mobile-friendly email is directing the customer to visit your website, then your website must also be mobile-friendly. Additionally, be sure your sales funnels are mobile-friendly if you are expecting a sales conversion. If it doesn't happen in that moment, it won't happen at all.

The most important elements of any email campaign are reader usability and readability. Ensuring your email is accessible by a large percentage of mobile readers is an essential step in increasing your click-through rates and customer following.

Lead Nurturing and Marketing Automation: Building Relationships Before You Make a Sale

Lead nurturing is a marketing term for building relationships with potential customers prior to actually selling your product or service to them. The truth of the matter is that nearly 80% of sales leads are not ready to make a purchase. By systematically providing a non-intrusive flow of information to the visitor, you are more likely to convert them into a customer.

Lead nurturing takes many forms, but it is all based around the concept that potential customers need varying types of information at different stages of the sales cycle. Tracking your potential customers' progress through the sales cycle allows you to address each of their needs at the

exact right time. Through a lead nurturing email campaign, email messages are sent to segmented lists of potential customers, providing a steady, but not overwhelming, amount of information based upon persona, demographics and interest in specific products or services.

Incorporating marketing automation software tracks the visitor's movements on your website to give you valuable insight into their interests. For example, if a person looks at a specific smartphone on your eCommerce website without making a purchase, your marketing automation software would allow you to send a follow-up email with similar phone options or perhaps accessories compatible with that phone.

Lead nurturing can be incredibly valuable for small and large businesses alike. How often are leads lost due to lack of information and follow-up? Additionally, how much time and energy is spent on leads that are highly unlikely to convert to a sale?

Segmentation and Micro-Targeting: Speaking With Your Intended Audience

The more you know about your customers, the better equipped you are to provide them with targeted offers, product suggestions and relevant content. Segmenting your database into more specific groupings of individuals is an essential element to any campaign. Micro-targeting takes it one step further to create smaller, more personal segments.

As you organize your database and integrate it with CRM systems, you will see the wealth of knowledge you have for each of your prospects and customers. You will see which products they've shown interest in. You may see the social media channels they have used to follow your company. You can glean information based upon the category of blog posts they read most on your site. That metadata becomes incredibly valuable in finely tuning messages tailored specifically for the individual.

Segmenting marketing database lists has been known to add value for years. However, many brands are just beginning to incorporate segmentation into their marketing plans. Now, the ability to micro-target your audience is growing in leaps and bounds. Whether your brand is segmenting your database into sub-lists of similar characteristics or micro-targeting each individual site visitor, tailoring messages to address the needs of your specific audience is an essential step in growing your reach and creating sales conversions.

A/B Split Testing: Knowing What Works for Your Audience

Not all tactics work for all audiences. Most email marketing tools now offer the ability to do A/B split testing to learn about your audience's specific interests. In the simplest terms, an A/B split test is running two similar versions of an email campaign to see which performs better.

Running an A/B split test is only effective if there is one changed variable. For instance, using different wording within the subject line of your email while keeping the exact same body provides you insight into how your target audience responds to your subject line wording. Similarly,

including the exact same information within the email, but presenting it in two varying designs can give you insight into the preferred layout for your customers.

As email marketing tools continue to grow in their capabilities, it's important to make the most out of the services they provide. Utilizing the A/B split testing is one of the easiest and often overlooked ways of learning what works for your specific audience.

Enhancing the Email Experience

As marketers continue to seek ways to stand out among their competitors and better address the preferences of their audience, many are adding tactics such as animated graphics, real-time email marketing, and location-specific email marketing.

Creating Movement with Animated Graphics

Since most email clients do not support video in their email systems, animated graphics have become an essential way for marketers to create movement within their email campaigns. Animated GIFs work like a mini slideshow, creating video-like movement when done well. While they have long been used to create humorous tidbits, brands are now leveraging these sorts of dynamic images to add value to their email campaigns. For instance, MailChimp made use of an animated GIF when explaining substantial program changes in their newsletter. Instead of simply being eye-catching, the image provided visual explanation of how to use the newly designed features of the program.

Similarly, for brands that have video-heavy presences on their websites or on platforms like YouTube, creating a teaser animated GIF is a great way to direct your email database to your highlighted video.

Real-Time Email Marketing

Real-time email marketing is designed to instill a sense of urgency in the reader. Limited time offers and short-term sales often work to drive readers to the website, but there are some important points to consider before adding real-time email marketing to your campaign.

Know your audience's timeline

If your audience is made up of the type of user that checks their email religiously, real-time offers work well. However, if a good portion of your audience will receive the offer after it has expired, it will only frustrate them.

Be mobile-friendly

If you are creating a sense of urgency for your readers, be sure that your website and sales funnel can accommodate their orders while they are on the go.

Be transparent

Especially when working with tech or marketing savvy audiences, be aware that your customers may see your limited time offer as a ploy. Tie your real-time offers in with something to make it relevant, such as a countdown to Christmas or the arrival of a new fall shipment.

Location-Specific Email Marketing

Many brands are beginning to recognize that offers and personalized emails based upon the individual's location are becoming more and more important to consumers on the go. In fact, Millennials have come to expect it! With the introduction of social check-ins, the online and offline worlds collided. When your users opt-in for location-based service programs, they are inviting you to interact with them.

While it is debated whether SMS text messages or email messages are more appropriate, most users will welcome a targeted offer or coupon sent in real-time while they are interacting with your brand.

List Building for Effective Email Marketing Campaigns

Your database is your key to communicating with current and prospective customers. Whether they have made a purchase or not, these are the people who are interested in the products or services you have to offer. As long as you respect their time and provide useful information, they want to hear from you.

Maintaining and building your contact list is essential for effective email marketing. Further, developing a clean database allows you to build campaigns that are personalized and incorporate dynamic tags.

Building Your List: Tactics for Growing Your Contact Database

Lists do not magically appear overnight. Yes, lists can be bought, but the most worthwhile lists are the ones you systematically develop by inviting individuals who are interacting with your brand to sign-up for your emails and share your valuable information.

The number one thing to keep in mind while creating your list building strategy is to make it ridiculously easy to sign up. By providing multiple, clear opportunities to sign up for your email list, you are increasing the likelihood that you will have a new contact.

Most marketers are aware that the sign-up module should appear in multiple places on the page, including the top of the sidebar and the footer, but there are some additional options that are often overlooked.

Feature Boxes: These work like a header and splash your brand across the top of the page. When someone lands on your page, they are immediately presented with the opportunity to sign up for your email campaigns.

Lightbox Pop-Ups: These can provide overwhelming results when building your list. Before you cringe, take this into consideration: from 2011 – 2013, Social Media Examiner grew their email list 375% to 190,000 followers, and CEO Michael Stelzner attributes that growth to the pop-up page. Remember, with customizable options now available for the pop-up boxes, you have unprecedented control. Perhaps the pop-up box doesn't appear until your visitor has spent two minutes on the page. Additionally, you can disable the pop-up box for mobile users.

Slideup Boxes: These are a less intrusive option for those who have found that the pop-up sign up box does not work for their audience. Sliding in from the bottom corner of the page, these boxes are also a very effective way to build your email database.

After Each Blog Post: Readers should have the ability to sign-up to receive more information from your brand. If readers make it to the end of your post, it means they clearly like the content you're offering.

A Hello or Viper Bar: This is a thin bar at the top of the page that has a specific call to action. Using this plugin to highlight your sign-up ensures your visitors are aware that you have more information to send them.

Using Social to Grow Your List

You have interaction with your customers on your social media accounts, so why not leverage these followers and convert them into email campaign recipients?

By creating a landing page for your email sign-up, you are able to easily leverage social media posts with invitations to gain additional information. Preview some of your exceptional content on your social media channels and invite your followers to learn more. The links can lead to gated information, which requires an opt-in to view.

Incentives, special offers, giveaways, and sweepstakes are also very effective ways of getting your social media followers to sign up for your email list. Additionally, Facebook makes it especially easy to incorporate a sign-up tab on your Facebook page. Look to see whether your email client has a Facebook app already created.

Legal Issues and Considerations

Countries across the world are continually adopting and developing their laws surrounding email campaigns and spam. In the United States, the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003 made it illegal to make false claims in the subject lines of email marketing messages. Additionally, it introduced the concept of requiring companies to provide the ability to opt-out of unwanted emails.

Today, email marketers are required to follow guidelines that protect the consumer. In addition to not being allowed to include misleading headings or subject lines and requiring clearly visible opt-out options, marketing emails are required to be marked as an advertisement and have a physical address associated with the company.

On July 1, 2014, Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL) came into effect. CASL requires either implied or expressed consent by the recipient in order to receive email marketing messages. This

hierarchy of consent is rather new to the email marketing world. Implied consent includes having made an inquiry, purchased a product or service, or became a member in some way or another. Implied consent allows a company to email the consumer for 6-24 months, depending on several factors surrounding the consent. If implied consent is not given, then the company must have documented expressed consent, or a direct sign-up, in order to email the consumer.

While CASL carries heavier fines than CAN-SPAM, breaking the laws surrounding spam can be incredibly costly to companies.

Conclusion

As email continues to evolve, brands are able to leverage new technologies to integrate their email campaigns into the lives of their customers. Begin by identifying your goals, understanding your target audience, and developing your mailing list.

If you're new to email marketing, start researching the many email campaign tools available, such as Constant Contact and MailChimp. These user-friendly tools will help guide you through the design process of your campaign. Additionally, many of these tools have editorials to educate you on how to best use the program.

Targeting your email campaign to address the needs of your customer (and potential customer) base will boost your conversions and get you closer to your goals. Remember, at the end of the day, email marketing is about connecting with your audience and providing them with a more enriched overall customer experience.

About the Author

Alison Lindemann received her BSBA from Washington University in St. Louis and is a Certified Internet Marketing Consultant, providing clients with specialized Internet business strategies tailored to their needs. Her experience conducting extensive online keyword and competitor research and developing successful Internet marketing strategies sets her apart. She works with businesses of all sizes in the areas of traffic generation, traffic conversion and client retention.

Alison's background includes 17 years in corporate management, including the positions of Director of Sales as well as Director of Service Operations for Farmers Insurance Group. During her time with Farmers, Alison was selected to lead a global business re-engineering project, working alongside the prestigious McKinsey Consulting Firm. She holds the CPCU and ARP Designations, and is a member of SEMPO (Search Engine Marketing Professionals Organization).

About WSI

WSI is a digital marketing company with a strong international presence. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, we also have offices in over 80 countries. We're a powerful network of marketers who strive to discover, analyze, build and implement digital solutions that win digital marketing awards and help businesses succeed online.

Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

Ready to move ahead and discuss a project with a local Digital Marketing Consultant? Get in touch with one of our experts now by visiting www.wsiworld.com/get-in-touch-with-an-expert

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[i] Marketing Land, http://marketingland.com/study-75-of-smartphone-owners-claim-they-are-highly-likely-to-delete-emails-if-they-cant-read-them-from-phone-55477