

Email marketing:

Low-cost marketing solution or dead duck?

Email marketing is a powerful way to promote your products or services either as a sales e-shot to prospects or newsletter style ezine to customers, prospects or the wider market. Yet email marketing results are often disappointing, even in the hands of marketing professionals.

Consider direct mail for a moment. You produce a mailshot and, if the address and contact details are correct, over 99% of your letters will arrive – even if it's junk mail. Email marketing is very different. There are over one billion spam emails sent every day, many of them containing malicious or inappropriate content and some of them even contain viruses and trojans. It's no surprise then that organisations have gone to great lengths to protect users from receiving unwanted and spam email.

When you produce an email you will use email software, such as Microsoft Outlook. Your email is sent via your ISP (Internet Service Provider, such as BT, AOL, TalkTalk, etc). Your email will then arrive at your recipients' ISP and is then downloaded by your recipients' email software.

Your ISP, your recipients' ISP, their email software and their computer will all have some level of security, from anti-spam software, firewalls, anti-virus software and junk email folders.

Email marketing therefore has to work much, much harder than direct mail. Even if it does arrive in the inbox of the intended recipient, the way it displays will often vary. An email viewed in Outlook 2003 can display differently in Outlook 2007, Gmail, or AOL. And what happens if the recipient receives it on their Blackberry or Smartphone?



CREATING AN EMAIL CAMPAIGN THAT DELIVERS RESULTS

Email marketing isn't a quick-fix cheap alternative to direct mail. It requires certain skills and experience, but once mastered very quickly your email marketing can become a very cost-effective solution for new business and to maintain relationships with existing customers.

Your email list

The first essential requirement is to use the right email list. Use a poor quality list with out-of-date or incorrect data and you will quickly be identified as a sender of junk email. If you are using email for prospecting, invest in the best email data available.

Avoid high-volume bulk sending

Send several thousand emails in one go and ISPs may identify you as a Spammer. So send them in short bursts a few minutes apart. Many of your contacts will use hosted email clients such as Hotmail or Gmail, and if these email clients receive bulk emails from you to distribute to their network of email addresses, they may determine you as high risk.

Use specialist software

Don't use MS Outlook or other standard email clients for email broadcasting; they are not designed for it and it will probably result in a very poor email campaign. Invest in specialist email marketing software or use hosted email solution such as web/hosted software.

Most email marketing software will let you design the email in WYSIWYG format (what you see is what you get), and will translate it into HTML code for sending.

Configure your domain

Set up a stand-alone domain or sub-domain for your email broadcasting, linked to your new email software. That way you will protect your main domain in the event of getting blacklisted, and you'll establish a good "reputation" over time, improving the results of your email marketing on subsequent campaigns.

SPAM score your email

Ensure your software has a spam scoring system, and test each email before sending it. Simple mistakes and certain words/phrases will increase your spam score, and your software should identify flag these and recommend changes.

Inbox test

Your email may look great in your email client or software, but what does it look like on your recipients? An email displaying perfectly in Outlook 2007 may not display correctly in other clients due to the software's interpretation of your HTML code. So test the final design in as many email clients as you can, otherwise you may send an email to many hundreds – or even thousands - of recipients who won't be able to read your email. And that is certainly no good for your business reputation.

Some high-end software systems have inbox testing facilities built in, and this is strongly recommended.

View in Browser

Add a 'view in browser' link to the top of your email. This means if your email does not display properly in the readers email software, they have the option to click this link and view the email in HTML format in their standard web browser.



Manage your subscription list

Not only is it mandatory to unsubscribe individuals from an email list if they request to be removed, it is also "best practice". On most email clients recipients have an option to "mark email as spam". If your email gets marked as spam it will seriously damage your online reputation with ISP providers and your domain could end up getting blacklisted.

Quality email marketing software systems will have unsubscribe functions and will automatically suppress emails on an unsubscribe list.

It is equally important to build and maintain your opt-in list. Many customers and prospects will want to receive your news. Suggest that recipients add your email address or domain to their "Safe Sender" list so they always receive it.

Add a "Forward to a Friend" function whereby the recipient can add a friend's email address to receive a copy. Having this feature means people are more likely to use it rather than simply forwarding the email – and at the same time you are building your email database.

THE EMAIL DESIGN

Email design should be clear and to the point; you only have a second to engage the recipient. Think of your email as you would an advert in a magazine that someone flicks through quickly. How will you grab the readers' attention?

If it's text heavy, readers will flick to the next email, but don't use graphics-only emails either; most email clients (including desktop versions such as Outlook and internet based such as Hotmail) automatically block images from view, with a request from the recipient to right-click to download images. Use a combination of text and graphics.

When producing your email in HTML you will set the width. We recommend setting this at 600 pixels wide. Although it is common to set the width at 800 or more pixels, many business users of MS Outlook use the side "preview pane" which has a default of 600. If your email is wider than this it means the recipient has to scroll sideways and you'll lose the impact of your campaign.

If it's an ezine you're sending, don't put all the copy into the ezine. Give the introductory paragraph or an abridged version with a link through to the full article on your website, landing zone or micro-site. This will speed up the downloading process and also encourage traffic through to your website.



WHAT DO YOU WANT THE RECIPIENT TO DO?

This is one of the most obvious points but is often badly thought out. Assuming your recipient has read your email, what now? This is electronic mail and your reader will expect to click through to an order form, enquiry form, your website, or micro-site relevant to the offer/email message. This “entry point” is known as the Landing Zone.

If the email contains a special promotion or specific product, and you simply add a hyperlink to the home page of your website, don't expect a great result.

The landing zone should be carefully designed to reflect the email itself, your corporate image and/or your website design. It might be some additional pages you add to your website, a separate micro-site or an online enquiry form. It is not unusual to have several landing zones relevant to specific products or offers.

If your software doesn't have built-in reporting and tracking, use a tracking tool such as Google Analytics to determine what landing zones produced the best results. You can then tune and refine your email marketing for further campaigns.

Your Sender ID and subject line
There are two things your recipient sees before opening or reading (or deleting) your email: the sender ID and the subject line.

The sender ID (also known as alias) is the name displayed in the “from” line. This is not

the same as the email address. The email address may be 'hello@insightdata.co.uk' but the alias might be 'John Smith' or 'Insight News'. It depends how formal or informal you want to be with your audience.

Your subject line is one of the key factors on whether your email will be read or not. Get it right and you'll be on to a winner, but if it's bland or uninspiring your email will end up in the Deleted folder before it's even opened.

Try split-testing using subject lines. Send a test email to 100 recipients, 50 using one subject line and 50 using another. Analyse the open rates and you'll soon know which subject line to use on your main campaign.

GET THE FACTS

One of the great benefits of email marketing – as opposed to direct mail – is the ability to analyse your activity and results in great detail. Choose email marketing software with analytics and reporting, and you'll be able to analyse what your open-rate and click-through rate is, two of the most important factors. You can even see which part of the email they clicked (eg relevant offers).

If your software has the capability of tracking, you can use it to find out what happened after the recipient clicked-through to the landing zone. What pages did they view? What products or services were they interested in?

You can then do two follow up emails as part of your campaign – email the people who

didn't open/click through with one email, and a second email to the recipients who clicked-through but didn't take it any further – perhaps with an extra special, time-limited offer or promotion, or the latest additional feature they may be interested in.

WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

If you're going to invest in email marketing, you need to do it properly. It's not just a case of sending a badly written email in Outlook to a bunch of old email addresses. It should form part of your overall marketing strategy and be given the time and detail that you would apply to all your marketing.

Invest the time to learn the ins and outs of email marketing, as outlined in this guide. Do it correctly – invest the time and the money – and you'll reap very significant rewards over time.

INSIGHT CAN DO IT FOR YOU



If you don't have the time, resources or inclination to master email marketing, then Insight Data can do it for you. We have a dedicated digital marketing team who specialise in all aspects of digital and email marketing.

We also have the latest state-of-the-art email software as well as a graphic design and copywriting team, so we can produce a range of email marketing solutions;

- Single e-shot
- Multiple e-shots with different products/services
- E-shots with purpose designed follow-up emails depending on recipient response
 - Electronic newsletters to a managed customer/prospect list
- Single page landing zone and/or enquiry form
 - Multi-page micro-site for multiple products or newsletter content
 - Full spam scoring and inbox testing
 - 'View in browser' and 'forward to a friend'
- Email lists supplied via the UK's leading email data supplier, with over 12,808 window industry contacts, 15,490 architects/specifiers, 9,487 local builders, 4,402 construction file and 5,459 solar installers.
- Email list management, including opt-ins and unsubscribe suppression
 - HTML design
- Graphic design and copywriting service
- Integrated email marketing with social media and websites
- Use our dedicated domain sending or we'll set up your own sub-domains
- Sender ID/Alias and Subject line creation
 - Full analytics and reporting

For more information on any of our digital marketing services, please contact us on 01934 808293 or email hello@insightdata.co.uk