The role of email marketing in the multi-channel evolution: Part 4

By Wikus Engelbrecht

4 Jul 2012

In the third part of this four-article series I drilled deeper into best practices for mobile-email optimisation, since this is a critical aspect of message retention from desktop to the handheld environment and something that can't ignored if you're serious about having a proper multi-channel strategy.

In this fourth and final part of this series, I talk about one of the methods of gathering email subscribers' social profile data while highlighting the main privacy and legal concerns you need to know about. To finish things off I take a quick look at what the rest of 2012 has in store for the multi-channel marketing evolution.

Connecting with customers in meaningful and relevant ways is the backbone of successful marketing

In a world where data is king, it has never been more important to use it cleverly to support cross-channel marketing activities that can better drive sales.

The data people share on social media can be quite valuable to businesses, since it helps them personalise their email and mobile optimised offers.

Some companies even specialise in collecting and selling consumer information on social network sites, but this information should however be treated with care - since not everyone is comfortable with the storage of their personal information, and some consumers may seek legal retribution if a marketer uses this without their consent.

Conditions for accessing social profile data

- At present, the onus is on the web user (whether on desktop, mobile or tablets) to setup their profile permissions to ensure that their information is either private or public, depending on their own preferences.
- At the same time, no advertiser or business is allowed to collect social data of its user without asking them to volunteer this information first.

Methods of accessing social profile data

Social media sites usually know more about your clients than you do - and some digital services offer tools to access that knowledge legitimately.

Social subscription, for example, is one way to allow visitors to subscribe to email newsletters via a social network login - as an alternative to filling in the traditional email address, name and other require fields manually.

Why enable email subscription via social login?

- Every social account can have lots of additional data about a user to help you refine your segmentation; from gender to location to interests.
- Social data helps you send more targeted promotions and adjust your campaigns to users' change of preferences or location.
- Research shows that if you personalise the experience between you and your subscribers, they are 50% more likely to return to your site, and 40% more likely to recommend you to others (Blue Inc. study 2012).
- Also as per Blue Inc. 2012, consumers often provide faulty information when subscribing via a form, with the majority admitting that they have given incomplete or incorrect information.
- The average social media user has 195 connections. Imagine the exposure and other marketing possibilities if you could tap into those connections.

In summary, social subscription integrated into newsletter subscription forms helps marketers grow their contact lists and learn more about their audience. It simplifies and increases the accuracy of the subscription process, helping drive increased conversions.

There are of course other methods of gathering social profile data (such as the Rapleaf service noted in Part 2 of this series) however, with new and more advanced tools like social subscribe being developed marketers today have an unprecedented ability to get and leverage social profile data.

Legal issues surrounding social data

Regardless of how you are accessing and using it - personal information published on the web has a lifespan far beyond the site where it originally may have been submitted, which is why social media data-use is increasingly finding its way into the courtroom.

Lawsuits alleging that consumers are entitled to monetary damages when their personal information has been misused, as well as regulatory enforcement actions that impose penalties on businesses that don't keep their privacy promises are on the rise.

While the use of social profile information with permission from each subscriber is perfectly fine, one principle to adhere to is that consumers still retain rights over their data, and so businesses should proceed with caution.

Here are a few tips to consider concerning social data use in email marketing and other cross-channel marketing efforts:

- Firstly, as an email marketer, it is important to inform and reassure anyone interested in signing up for your campaign that their data is safe.
- Be transparent about your usage of social media data. Tell people what you actually want to know and how you'll be using that knowledge.
- Never sell or share the information you've collected. Ever.
- Inform subscribers they need to consider their privacy settings, so they do not inadvertently share information that they consider to be strictly private.
- Include a link to your privacy and security policy in your sign-up form and in the footer of every email. This

consistently showcases your respect for every subscriber's data.

The next wave in the multi-channel marketing evolution

"SoLoMo", the latest online buzzword, is a combination of social, location-based and mobile marketing and a quickly emerging trend this year that everyone should have on their radar by now.

An example of SoLoMo would be a smartphone app that determines your location, suggests restaurants close by based on what kind of cuisine you've been searching for or culinary newsletters you're signed up to. This can even extend to providing reviews and ratings for those restaurants, rewards for entering their premises or buying certain items off the menu. It may even trigger pre-set email autoresponders for future dining suggestions or perhaps for other relevant information such as restaurant trading hours, contact details for bookings and so on.

Today, people everywhere are using their mobile device to find what they want with the 'right here, right now' mindset - which is what SoLoMo aims to leverage. The possibilities of what you can do with SoLoMo in your marketing toolbox are compelling, creative and multifaceted.

SoLoMo is all about giving people highly targeted, cross-channel and context-rich communications; a sophisticated concept that I believe will fuel innovation in all direct marketing channels - but only if you're able to nail down a competent multi-channel strategy with essential existing platforms, such as email, social and mobile.

Always remember that the technology in the hands of consumers is constantly changing, and so too do their habits and expectations as a result. Marketers that continue to place email, mobile and social activities in independent silos are poised to fall behind on the times - and so - suffer from declines in response rates and weakened customer relationships.

Conclusion

Separately, email, social and mobile are extremely effective marketing tools. Working together, they have the potential to raise the bar on customer engagement to new levels. Now is the time for marketers the world over to marry the immediacy of mobile, the intimacy of social and the ubiquity of email into one unified strategy.

See:

- The role of email marketing in the multi-channel evolution: Part 1
- The role of email marketing in the multi-channel evolution: Part 2
- The role of email marketing in the multi-channel evolution: Part 3

ABOUT WIKUS ENGELBRECHT

Wikus Engelbrecht is a marketing writer, journalist and media liaison at GraphicMail (www.graphicmail.co.za; @GraphicMail), an international email and mobile marketing service provider. Since 2003, his professional career in language and media has spanned the film, print advertising, magazine publishing, web development and online content industries. Contact Wikus at wikus@graphicmail.com and follow @WKS_Engelbrecht on Twitter.

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