

The ins and outs of e-mail marketing

When managed correctly e-mail marketing can be a powerful tool and the core of any Relationship Marketing Programme. IT marketing expert Linda Ravenhill gives a few pointers to help you make the most of your e-mail campaign.

By [Linda Ravenhill](#) 3 Sep 2002

E-mail marketing is proving increasingly effective as part of the overall sales and marketing effort. Using e-mail to communicate *en masse* with your customers has many benefits: it is cost effective, can be personalised, event-driven and tracked. But in certain sectors e-mail marketing is rapidly gaining a reputation for rivalling Internet banners and pop-ups as the new digital irritant. However, managed correctly, it can be a powerful tool and should form the core of any Relationship Marketing Programme.

The pointers below will help you make the most of your e-mail campaign.

1. The List:

Send your e-mail only to people who have requested it: Nothing is more damaging to your company brand than to be seen as spamming customers.

Always provide an Unsubscribe Feature or similar mechanism on your e-mail where people can request not to receive your mail. Offering your customers this option may positively impact your brand.

2. The Message:

Text vs HTML

We recommend plain text. It is quick to download, and easy to read and access. HTML mail is becoming more popular, but download speeds and Browser compatibility still play a part in the S.A. environment. Ask your customers when they sign up how they would prefer to receive your e-mail communications.

The Headline

The Subject or Headline of your e-mail will determine how many people open the e-mail. It is becoming harder to break through the clutter in your customers' Inbox, so you need to be inventive with the Headline you want to catch their attention.

The Message

Spend time crafting your message - you've only got a few minutes to pull your customer in.

- Personalised e-mail is always preferable, but only if you have the correct details. When you are acquiring data for your e-mail lists, ask how the customer would like to be addressed. "Dear Joe Smith" smacks of a bulk mailer, and may put him off reading further.
- Provide sufficient information for your user:
 - Communicate your message in the first few sentences. Then even if some users simply scan the e-mail

they will absorb the essence of your message.

- For people who may want more information, provide links that will direct them to the appropriate source of information on a web page. Make sure these links work - if the user is taking the time to investigate your offer, you must deliver on your promise.

- Ensure your message is concise and focused. Include lots of white space on the e-mail and clearly indicate the purpose of your communication.
- Attachments as part of bulk e-mails are still controversial. Think carefully before including them.
- End your e-mail appropriately. Anonymous e-mails are pointless, personalised communications are far more impressive.

3. Managing the Campaign:

- You need a system in place that manages your replies to people who respond to your e-mails.
- Make sure opt-outs to the list are removed promptly. Receiving e-mail after an opt-out request is as annoying as receiving unsolicited mail.
- Track the response to your e-mail, be it monitoring webstats or take-ups of your offer. Experiment with different types of message formats, tones etc to see what works, then build on that information.

Finally, use every opportunity to gather permission-based e-mails. They will form the basis of your e-CRM programme and, if managed with care, will enhance your brand cost-effectively.

ABOUT LINDA RAVENHILL

Linda Ravenhill co-founded Digital Exception (www.digitalexception.co.za) in 2000 and together with business partner Elena Douvos, the company specialises in taking physical business into the online environment, offering the full spectrum of online services. These include strategy, IT development, community management and online marketing. For further information contact 011 478 3232, or email info@digitalexception.co.za.
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