

Yes, email is still relevant

 By [Darren van der Schyff](#)

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Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg famously announced the death of email two years ago, which makes one wonder what he knows that we don't. Of course, the truth is that email has not been replaced by direct and personal messaging systems, nor has Facebook itself stopped using email to drive engagement with existing and potential users.

And in digitally-emerging markets like South Africa, this is truer than ever. Research shows that the number one reason South Africans sign up to an internet service is to get an email account. And according to Google, email is beaten only by browsing in mobile internet usage.

Add to this the prediction that the world's number of unique email addresses will grow to more than 4 billion by 2015, up from 3.1 billion in 2011, and it's clear that email is unlikely to relinquish its position as a preferred digital communication medium. Email may not have the sex appeal of social media platforms, and yes, it's been around since even before the internet itself, but through all that it has largely remained an unchanged platform. And therein lies its strength.

Not an either/or equation

This was underscored by research done recently by Nielsen and e-Circle into the effectiveness of email marketing versus display marketing.

What is most interesting is that it's not an either/or equation, and that the most effective campaigns are those that use a combination of these platforms. Key measures from the study show that when combined they increase traffic by a factor of four, increase the disposition to buy by 47% and that advertising recall of the campaign is improved by 13% compared to display-only campaigns.

These statistics apply to the younger generation as much as the experienced users, although the former had a much stronger advertising and brand association when the campaigns included email marketing. So, the opportunity in email marketing is still massive in South Africa and won't be going away anytime soon. In fact, it is expected to continue to grow as a marketing communications tool and the shift to companies building their own opt-in databases is evidence of its importance. These proprietary databases are actually very similar to 'likes' and followers, as these people have very clearly subscribed to your brand's communication and form part of your community.

Email's clear advantage

Email does, however, have certain clear advantages over other marketing tools. One of the most ignored benefits is that you

have the undivided attention of the recipient. An email window is a space uncluttered by other information, brands or distracting links. You own the space.

Measurement and monitoring tools have also evolved to the point that it's possible to extract an incredible number of metrics from email campaigns, which other platforms struggle to do to the same extent. Apart from seeing how many messages were delivered, opened or prompted click-throughs, we're now even able to tell how long the recipient spent reading the message. One of the obvious advantages that email has over traditional marketing tools is undoubtedly the cost of delivery, which is taken to a whole new level when the recipients are targeted correctly.

The anatomy of a successful email campaign

It goes without saying that simply copying text from the print ads, pasting that into an email and sending this to your entire address book is not going to deliver the required results. As with any other element of your marketing plan, your email campaign needs certain ingredients if it is to be effective. Demographica has built up considerable experience over the years in doing exactly that, and has developed a methodology that is part science, part art.

The science involves drawing on past results and practices, specialist tools and our own methodologies to ensure that the campaign is targeted in any number of ways - whether that be age, sex, location, income, a predisposition for the product or indicated preferences. This process includes taking care of technical issues such as browser and OS compatibility, checking links and return paths, and of course that the content is spam-filter friendly.

The art of the email campaign has to consider not only the correct creative execution in line with the brand and campaign guidelines, but also that this delivers better results by following a few basic rules. These design and layout rules have been encapsulated in the [Demographica Email Design Bible](#), which is available as a free download off our website. This document contains the many lessons we've learnt over the years and that we wanted to share with clients to help them understand the importance of things such as the optimum logo placement, text to image ratios, how to prioritise content and to create a bold and clear call to action.

The future of email

There are many exciting developments that can be easily incorporated into email campaigns to deliver 'richer' experiences, and they're not far from becoming reality here.

The buzzword at the moment is mobile and digital coupons or vouchers, which is a really powerful tool to drive in-store behaviour. The basic premise is that marketers can email a time and location-specific discount voucher that is loaded into a mobile app that prompts the user when in the proximity of a store offering the special.

The other exciting development is the rolling out of HTML5 compatibility in email apps that will enable video to be played directly in the email message. This new protocol is going to change the way emails are constructed and although it's still pretty new, marketers are already exploring innovative ways to take advantage of the added functionality.

The final development that is rapidly gaining popularity is to incorporate 'social share' functionality into email messages that allow users to share portions of the entire message. So if you want to share a special deal on golf clubs with your golfing partner and a deal on a flatscreen TV with your husband or wife, you can send each to them individually without having to forward the entire message.

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