



eMail Your Way to Success

The Principles of Email Marketing



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About Comm100: The #1 Fastest Growing Customer Service Software

1. Why Send Email: How Email & Newsletter Follow up Increases Customer Lifespan?

In This Article... If you're considering implementing an Email Marketing program but aren't sure if it's really worth the time or effort, this article explains how Email Marketing can turn your customers into more loyal customers who, in turn, are more profitable customers. In this article, Comm100 explains the customer lifecycle and what type of email to send at each point to get the most out of your customers and your Email Marketing program.

The Customer Lifecycle and Email

All customers have a lifecycle with your company or brand. They start when they become a customer, are active as they make a certain number of purchases or site visits, and then lapse or exit your brand. Email is a reliable, robust and cost effective way to both acquire new customers and also to make your existing customers repeat, loyal customers.

Because even bulk email is easy to personalize, you can create messages that speak to customers' exact needs at any point in the customer lifecycle. You can affordably contact and recruit new customers, and you can also continue to promote your company to customers after their initial purchase. Sending existing customers email reminders, special offers or even just information newsletters gives those customers a reason to return to your company or website.

Sending the right email at the right point in a customer's lifecycle is the key to activating, retaining and even winning back customers. Here's what to send, and when!

New Customers Leads: Big Offers, Big Brand Talk

If you're using an email list to contact prospective customers, you need to remember that you are dealing with people who may not know your brand or your product. Cold leads are not inclined to purchase naturally, so you need to put a big offer in front of them! Emphasize your value proposition, but the nature of these emails needs to be a hard sell.

Also remember that you may expect a small return from these emails. That means that it is equally important that even if the email doesn't spur an immediate action, it establishes your brand in the user's mind. Make the email content engaging and promote your brand visually and within the text. Then, the next time the user thinks of a product related to you, they will remember your email solicit.

New Customers: Make Them Feel a Part of Something!

You've got a customer! What's the best way to make sure that customer keeps coming back? Make them feel like they're special and part of a conversation with your company instead of just a nameless face in your customer database.

Adding an automated email (with personalization if your database captures it) that generates after an initial sign-up or purchase is a great retention tool.

The email should come from a key figure in your company (CEO, President) or a personalized customer service agent. The email should not only thank the customer for the purchase but also ask them for feedback, educate them about your company and give them clear directions on how to contact customer service for any of their needs.

Active Customers: Newsletters and Weekly Specials Keep Them Paying Attention

We all know that very few active customers will stay active customers forever. However, one way to extend the length of time during which they will stay active is to use email to give them both relevant information and incentives to continue purchasing.

A simple weekly email that includes a quote of the week or fun fact and that week's special goes miles to keeping customers engaged. The one thing Comm100 wouldn't recommend is using your weekly email only to promote specials. Content such as articles and factoids will drive opens and readership even when a customer isn't in a purchasing cycle and therefore increases customers' engagement time with your brand.

Short Term Lapsed Customers: A Little Push!

Most places define "short term lapsed" customers as customers who haven't taken an action in the last thirty days. This may vary for your product and purchasing cycle. The most important email that you can send is to identify these "just lapsed" customers and send them an offer right as they are hitting the short term lapsed threshold.

At that point in their customer life cycle, customers will still have brand awareness and loyalty. It may take just a small offer from you to get them back

into the purchasing cycle. Sending them an offer to respond to before they become further distanced from your company or brand will have the greatest impact on lengthening customer lifespan.

Long Term Lapsed Customers: New Customer Leads All Over Again

Don't let that database of inactive customers go to waste! Many of those clients will have brand loyalty and existing reasons to return to purchasing from you.

Comm100 suggests emailing your long term lapsed list once a quarter. Unfortunately, you'll need to pull out the big offers again. These are customers who, for whatever reason, went away. You're trying to convince them to come back. What's the benefit? They'll likely be less resistant than completely cold leads.

Seasonal Customers: Remind Them That You Exist!

If you market a seasonal product, you should send a cycle of emails to your lapsed clients leading up to their seasonal purchases. They'll certainly be getting exposed to marketing messages from your competitors and may just need a friendly reminder from you that you've successfully met their seasonal needs before. Identifying these users in your database and communicating with them at the right time brings them back, and extends their value to you.

Email marketing can be as simple as sending a weekly Newsletter that summarizes what happened with your company that week, but it also has potential beyond that. Taking the time to identify customer patterns in your database and sending those customers the right message at the right time can increase your customers' engagement and activity with you ... and that will increase their revenue value!

2. Email Marketing 101: 10 Terms & Concepts You Need to Know

In This Article... If you've decided to implement an Email Marketing program or are ready to talk to your marketing team or a consultant about email marketing, this article will introduce you to the important terminology, concepts and metrics that you'll need to understand. Once you have a basic grip on those concepts, you'll be able to properly evaluate the success of an email campaign or the knowledge of any consultants you may be interviewing.

Learning the Lingo of Email Marketing

The first step to creating a successful plan of action is to understand the key elements of email marketing so that you can speak the language! Comm100 has boiled it down to a top ten, though reading all of the resources in this section of the website can give you a much greater jump start.

1. Open Rate

Open rate means, quite simply, how many people (in percentage form) opened the email that you sent. This metric, however, is becoming less important in anything other than a relative way. Email open rates are tracked using a small graphic in the email. Many email providers block graphics. Because of this graphic blocking, a client may open an email and have it not register as being opened unless the client actively turns on graphics. Some reports suggest that standard open rate reporting can be off by as much as 35%, depending on your email list.

What you should remember is that open rates should be highest when emailing your existing customers and lowest with cold leads. Comparing open rates across various sends is useful, too. It's not a 100% accurate number, however.

2. Click-Through Rate

Click-through rate is the number of clicks (in percentage format) compared to the number of opened emails (NOT to the entire send). Different companies measure this in different ways. Unfortunately, there isn't a standard answer for the question: "Is it all clicks or does only one click count per open?" This measurement is important because the entire purpose of your email is to drive traffic to your landing page or website.

3. Deliverability

Deliverability means the number of emails from your send that actually made it to the inbox (as opposed to the junk folder or the black hole of "unknown address"). Getting your email into the inbox can be a complicated process, and Comm100 has gone into detail in a full article in this section.

4. Personalization

Personalization is when you use a client's user name, first name or other unique information in the email that you send. To do this, your database needs to capture that information, and your email service provider needs to accept and include data fields that match. Be careful using personalization. It's not appropriate for every industry. However, in the right context, it can improve email conversions dramatically.

5. List Cleaning/List Scrubbing/List Pruning

Keeping your email list “clean” is important. The more bad email addresses (typos, defunct accounts, etc.) that you have on a list, the more likely you are to get flagged as potential spam. Also, your reporting metrics won’t reflect your email’s true performance. Many email providers automatically prune lists of bad names as you go along. Explore your options with your email provider.

6. CAN-SPAM

CAN-SPAM is a piece of U.S. federal legislation that was passed in 2003. It’s a set of rules that you MUST follow when sending email if you want to not be classified as spam and potentially face federal fines and penalties. Comm100 has included an article in this section that details the rules. Make sure you know them!

7. Opt-In/Double Opt-In

There are three kinds of email lists. “Opt-In” means that your users have “opted into” your email list and given you permission to email them. “Double Opt-In” means that users have given you permission twice (usually via a confirmation link in an email). All other lists are considered cold lists or prospect lists (usually bought or rented). There are different benefits to each kind of list. See our full article to figure out which is best for you!

8. Unsubscribe/Opt-Out

Quite simply, this is the ability of users to unsubscribe from your email list. There are two types: Universal Unsubs and List Specific Unsubs. Universal Unsubs are users who unsubscribe from all future emails of any kind from you. List Specific Unsubs will unsubscribe from just a portion of your list. For example, they don’t want special offers but do want weekly newsletters.

9. HTML Email/Plain Text Email

These are the two types of email that you can send. An html email includes colors, tables and graphics. A plain text email includes only text. In truth, you should send both formats because not all email clients (and particularly some phones) accept html email. However, figuring out what balance works for you may be trial and error.

10. Bounce Back

Bounce back is the number of names on a list that get returned to you as “undeliverable”. This could be because the email address was mis-typed, the email address doesn’t exist any more, the email address has a full inbox, or any other number of reasons. This metric is most important when you’re using a bought or rented list because it shows you how many bad email addresses you purchased.

3. CAN-SPAM Compliance: What Is CAN-SPAM & Why Does It Matter

In This Article... If you're starting an email campaign or if you've been Email Marketing already but aren't sure if your marketing emails are CAN-SPAM compliant, this article explains what CAN-SPAM laws are and how to make sure that your email program is compliant with them.

What is CAN-SPAM and Why is It Important?

It's possible that you don't even know what CAN-SPAM is. Maybe you think that it involves a popular processed meat product. However, if you're going to send email to your customers, CAN-SPAM is a very important law that you need to know about. It governs whether the email you send is considered a legal communication or an illegal piece of unsolicited spam. If you don't abide by it, you're subject to fines and penalties from the U.S. federal government.

In this article, Comm100 will give you the history of what CAN-SPAM is. Then Comm100 will tell you what you need to do in order to be compliant.

A Touch of History: The Passing of the CAN-SPAM Law

In 2003, as inboxes were being flooded with unwanted email spam, the United States federal government took action with the passing of the CAN-SPAM law. CAN-SPAM stands for Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography And Marketing Act of 2003. Essentially, the law set forth a number of requirements that need to be met in order to send commercial email to customers.

It's important to note that the law makes a difference between a commercial email and

transactional email. If you're responding to a customer service inquiry or sending an automated email receipt of purchase, you don't need to worry about CAN-SPAM. However, any email that contains marketing information or a customer solicitation must comply with the requirements of the law (and that includes promoting links to content on advertising-driven websites). Each individual violation of a rule in the CAN-SPAM requirements can leave you open to a fine of up to \$16,000, so following the rules is important! Fortunately, there's an easy checklist for you to follow.

CAN-SPAM Compliance Checklist

Once you get past all the government language, CAN-SPAM isn't that complicated. If you just follow seven simple steps, you'll be completely safe.

Step One: Be Who You Say You Are!

You can't pretend to be another website or company just to get a user to open an email (or to get into the inbox). This is a popular trick offshore spammers use to get through spam filters, but it's illegal. The email address that you send from (the "from" address and the reply-to address) must be your own. The domain that you promote in the email must either be your own or be one that you are authorized to promote, and it MUST be the domain that you say it is (i.e.: you can't tell people

that they are going to a site that sells coffee and then send them to an adult entertainment site). Basically, the information that a customer sees in the email has to actually be you or your business.

Step Two: Don't Lie in the Subject Line

This one is easy. If your subject line says that opening the email will give the user a daily quote of the day, then that's what needs to be in the email. You can't use a subject line that promises a discount on groceries and then present an email that promotes anything other than a discount on groceries. In short, your subject line has to be truthful. The terminology of the law is that your subject line can't be "misleading".

Step Three: Tell Them That You're an Advertisement

You can do this many ways, including small print at the bottom of the email. However, somewhere in your email, you need to make it clear that the email is an advertisement. It may seem obvious to you, but the law says that you need to make it explicit at least once in the email.

Step Four: You Need to Have an Actual Physical Location

This one is also simple. Somewhere in your email you must provide a physical postal address (street or postal box) where you can receive communications via mail. This ensures that you are not a scammer and also allows customers a way of sending a verified communication to you to remove themselves from your mailing list.

Step Five: You Have to Let People Know How to Opt-Out

You cannot (and should not) send a marketing email without letting users know how to stop you from sending future emails to them. This is called

allowing users to Opt-Out of your email list. This is typically done at the bottom of the email. The only actual CAN-SPAM requirement is that it be easy for an ordinary person to recognize and read this information. Also important is the "universal unsub rule". If you have multiple newsletters or email lists, you may allow a person to unsub from only one list. However, you **MUST** provide the option of unsubscribing from ALL future marketing email of any kind. Unsubscribing from all future marketing email is called a "universal unsub".

Step Six: When People Want Off Your Email List, Take Them Off.

When somebody requests an opt-out or unsub from your email list or lists, you have up to 10 business days to remove them. When you send an email, the information or link to unsubscribe from that email must be valid for 30 days. You're not allowed to charge a fee for removal from the list or require any information other than the user's email address. Most importantly, the user can't be required to do anything other than send you a reply email or visit a SINGLE webpage to unsubscribe. Finally, once a user has unsubscribed, you may not under any circumstance sell or rent that person's email to anybody else. This is the most complicated part of the law, but it's also the most important. And, if you don't honor it, it's the easiest to get in trouble for because people will get upset if they continue to receive unwanted email from you.

Step Seven: Make Sure You Know What Your Marketing Agency is Doing!

Also make sure that you know what your affiliates are doing! Make sure that you know what anybody who sends email on your behalf is doing! You are legally responsible for the actions of anybody you hire or authorize to send marketing email on your behalf.

There you go. Follow these simple seven steps, and you will be CAN-SPAM compliant. Most third-party email platform providers will actually make sure that any of these criteria that can be automated (such as physical address, unsub links

and removing unsubscribed members) are automated. However, it's in your best interest to always review your marketing emails before they go out to make sure that they meet every criterion on the checklist!

4. Hit the Inbox: 10 Tips to Keep Your Email from Going to the Junk Folder

In This Article... If you're beginning an email program or you've been sending email already but know that you're going into your recipients' junk mail folders, this article explains how to improve deliverability. In this article, you'll learn how to optimize your email program to give it the best chance of making into a user's inbox. This process is called "deliverability" and is the first step to successful Email Marketing.

What is "Hitting the Inbox"?

One of the greatest problems facing email marketers is making sure that your email goes to the user's inbox instead of the spam folder. When everything is driven by whether a user opens an email, that means that the user needs to actually SEE the email first. In truth, how many of us check our spam or junk folders regularly?

Getting your marketing email to actually go into the inbox is one of the most complicated parts of Email Marketing (and the part that fails the most often). Here are ten tips to keep your email from ending up in the junk folder.

1. Get on the Hotmail and Yahoo! White Lists

Hotmail and Yahoo! both keep lists of approved senders. Once you're on that list, you'll almost always go into the inbox. If you send a particularly spammy email, however, you can be removed from the list. The process can be frustrating and take a long time, but it's well worth it.

2. If You're Using Your Own Server, Make Sure it "Drips" the Messages

Spam filters at most email providers look to see how many messages you're sending at a time. If you're sending to a large list, even if you have a

fast and efficient email sending server, have the server "drip" the messages out slowly. You really don't want more than a couple thousand to hit any one email provider per hour if you're playing it safely.

3. Break Large Lists Into Smaller Ones

There are many reasons to break large email lists into smaller ones, but the best reason is that doing so will mean that the spam complaints that you receive when you send your email won't be in one huge mass. It is inevitable that even loyal subscribers sometimes mark you as spam. If you send your large list in smaller segments, the email provider (Hotmail, MSN, etc.) will see less spam complaints bundled together at one time.

4. "Clean" Your Email List Frequently

Most, if not all, email providers' spam filters penalize your domain or IP with a higher spam score (meaning you are more likely to end up in the junk folder) if they see that you are sending emails to bad email accounts. A bad email account is an address that doesn't exist, has been disabled or has a full inbox. These addresses should be cleaned (or "pruned") from your email list regularly to avoid this. If you allow them to add up on your list, you will eventually be flagged as a spam provider.

5. Provide a Clear Unsubscribe Link

Nobody likes it when somebody unsubscribes from their email list. However, providing a clear way to unsubscribe (and then honoring that unsub quickly) means that users are less likely to get frustrated and just mark you as spam. The number one criterion for ending up in the junk box is the number of spam complaints that you receive, so avoiding them at all costs is critical.

6. Encourage Your Customers to Add You as a Friend or Contact

Once a user has added you to his or her contact list, friend list or address book, you will always end up in their inbox. Use every opportunity to encourage those on your email list to add you as a contact. Comm100 suggests doing it in the email sign up conformation email, on the confirmation page and during most customer service transactions. A typical way to ask customers to do this is to say, "Ensure that you continue to receive the quality information from us that you enjoy by adding us to your contact list."

7. Test Your Email to Seed Addresses BEFORE You Send to the Main List

Before you send your entire email list the message you've worked so hard on, send a test message to each of the big email providers (Hotmail, Yahoo, MSN, Gmail, AOL and one generic office address that is viewed in an Outlook client). Send the test email using the exact same server and information that you'll use with your main list. If you end up in the junk box on the test send, then you'll end up in the junk box on your main send. The pre-send test means that you can try different subject lines and email content to try to figure out what sent you to spam.

8. Don't Have Sloppy HTML Code

Spam filters check for bad html code, particularly if it looks like the code was done in Microsoft Word and then thrown into an email. Use a professional coder (preferably one who has done email templates before and knows the best way to make them resolve properly in an inbox) or a template provided by your email sending partner.

9. Don't Use "The Big Image"

Sending an email that's all one big image file is a bad idea for many reasons. Foremost among those reasons is that spam filters look for those types of image-based emails. Big image files often carry hidden messages that would normally get caught in spam filters (words like "free" and "Viagra"), so, when a spam filter can't read any real text in an email and only sees an image, it assumes the worst.

10. Don't Write Text that Sounds Like a Spammer!

This one should be obvious! The more "spam-like" text and phrases your email uses, the less likely it is to end up in the inbox. There are a number of free software solutions to check the "spam score" of an email before you send it, but there are also basic rules.

- Don't use the word "free" too many times.
- Don't use ALL CAPS.
- Don't use lots of colored fonts.
- Only use one exclamation point at a time!
- Stay away from words you'd see in spam: Viagra, drugs, porn, guaranteed winner.

If you've seen it used in a spam message that you received, don't use it in your own email message!

Even if you do all of these things and do them perfectly, you may still end up in the junk box. Email spam filter criteria change almost daily and can be impacted by things that you have no control

over. However, if you, as a habit, send good email that your clients want, you'll get into the inbox more often than not. Be sure to follow the above guidelines because, once an email provider thinks that your email is spam, it is very hard to get back into the inbox!

5. Plain Text or HTML: Which Email Template Type Should You Use?

In This Article... If you're beginning an email campaign and aren't sure whether to use a graphically-based html email template to improve the visual appearance of your email or a plain text email template to improve the deliverability of your email (and conserve resources), this article lays out the pros and cons of each type. Comm100 will then give you advice on how to optimize your Email Marketing metrics through template formats and displays.

What are Plain Text Email and HTML Email?

The first thing that you need to understand is "What is plain text email?" and "What is html email?" HTML email is an email that is formatted like a web page, using colors, graphics, table columns and links. Imagine any Newsletter that you receive from a service. That's most likely what an HTML email looks like. A plain text email is an email that only includes text. Imagine your typical inter-office email communication. That's what a plain text email looks like.

Email marketers generally don't debate which format is better. HTML email converts better in marketing tests almost every time. However, there are some factors you should consider before deciding which mail format to use. Ultimately, there's a solution to getting the best part of both worlds.

HTML Email

HTML email does, in fact, come with some problems attached to it. It's an imperfect science, and you should be aware of ways in which html email can fail.

- **Spam:** HTML email can put you in the spam folder if your code is sloppy. Email providers' spam filters look for code that looks like it's
- **Coding Time:** HTML emails are also harder to code than html pages. They need to be coded to appeal to spam filters, and to use css in very specific ways. In some cases, you'll even need to use different html email templates to send to different providers in order to make your email look consistent in all email clients.
- **End User Display:** Some email providers (Gmail, particularly) will strip out many elements of your html email code regardless of how well it's built. So no matter how many hours your developer and designer spent making your email look amazing, it may still end up as black text on a white background with blue links.
- **Image Blocking:** Almost without fail, the majority of your end users will be reading their email with their images turned off. Therefore, every image that you used in your html email will be invisible to them. That means that there will be lots of dead white space in their email instead of colorful, inviting sales or informational text.
- **Mobile Phone Users:** Up to 20% of your end users are reading their email on their mobile phone. Your html email won't display at all on many phones.

been copied from a Word document, and they increase your spam score based on that.

However, it's important to keep in mind the benefits of html email.

- **Better Visual Engagement:** You only have a fraction of a second when a user opens an email for them to decide whether to read it or immediately delete it. The use of color and interesting visuals can keep them interested long enough to read and become interested in your message.
- **Better Information Organization:** Most messages are not best delivered in a chunky text paragraph but instead in bulleted lists, columns, table layouts and a variety of text justifications. Also, differentiating words and concepts with color makes it easier on the reader to identify the important parts of the email. This can't be done with plain text.

Pros and Cons

If you wanted to break it down into an easy theory to remember, it would sound like this:

Plain text email is better if

- You are incredibly worried about deliverability into the inbox
- You are expecting replies to be sent to your email
- You are concerned about making sure your email visuals do not break or appear incorrectly in email clients
- You don't have the development and design resources to create a well tested, tightly coded html email template

HTML email is better if:

- Your main objective is to convert a sale
- The information you are presenting needs to be visually organized
- You have the in-house resources to create a workable and successful email template
- And, most importantly, you can send a plain text version as well (see below)!

Send Both!

The best solution if you want to send an html email is to send a plain text version attached. The plain text version will then display in instances where the html version can't load. For example, the plain text version would appear in many mobile phone scenarios and often certain Outlook clients. Many third party email providers offer this option as a default option. In fact, some of them even require that you enter a plain text version along with your html version before they will allow you to send. In this way, you will get the benefit of displaying color, graphics and format to those who can see it without prohibiting your other users from reading the message.

If, however, you've only got the capability to send one option or the other, Comm100 suggests you review the pros and cons above and then decide which is best for you. It won't be the same answer for everybody!

6. Opt in? Opt out? What is single opt in and double opt in? Which is better for you?

In This Article... If you are starting to build an email list, either on your website or by purchasing or renting emails from others, this article explains the three different kinds of email lists and the pros and cons of each. Those email list types range from the most restrictive to the least restrictive. Each is explained in detail below.

What are the Types of Opt-In Lists?

You started building up your email list through a sign up box on your site or a checkbox when a person registers or purchases a product. Then, along came some fussy marketing consultant and said, “Is this an opt-in list? Is it a double opt-in list?” You probably looked at them and wondered what exactly they meant and why it mattered.

There are three ways to build an email list: Negative Opt-Out, Opt-In and Double Opt-In. Comm100 will describe all three options here as well as their benefits and drawbacks. You can then decide which is the right list option for you.

Negative Opt-Out Email Lists

You’ll sometimes hear this type of list called simply “Opt-Out” or “Negative Consent”. When a person registers at your website, makes a purchase or signs up for a free white paper or other freebie from you, somewhere in the small print is the information that by taking that action they are agreeing to receive email from you. The user can choose to opt-out and leave the email list later, but they’ve implicitly given you permission to email them.

The upside of this method is that it can grow your list very quickly. If everybody who takes an action on your site is then on your email list, your list can grow quite rapidly. Many of those people who

wouldn’t have actively signed up for your email list if you asked them to will ultimately discover that they appreciate your email newsletters or promotions and will turn into active readers and customers.

The downside is that this type of list building can also increase the number of spam complaints that you receive when you send an email. Users who don’t remember signing up for your email, or who are angry that you tricked them into signing up, will quickly hit the spam flag when they receive your email. This has negative long and short term effects. In the short term, it makes your email metrics look less successful. In the long term, higher than average spam complaints will do permanent damage to your email sender reputation and could result in all of your emails going directly to the junk folder.

Opt-In Email Lists

In this type of email list, a user actively opts-in, or chooses to be on, your email list. This can be done either by having them check a box when they register or purchase or by including a special sign-up box on your website. Users enter their email, check a box that says that they agree to receive email from you and then submit that information via a clickable button. You can also choose to collect other customer or client information at the same time.

The benefit of this type of email list is that your clients are actively saying that they want to receive email from you. Therefore you're building the most responsive email list that you can.

However, there are some drawbacks as well. Your email list will grow more slowly. People will not as often take the extra action to sign-up as they will simply forget to "not sign up". Also, because this isn't a "double opt-in" technique (see below), it's entirely possible for people to sign-up their friends and family. When that happens, you can expect the much-feared spam complaints.

Double Opt-In Email Lists

This is the most difficult, but ultimately safest, way to build an email list. It also usually has the highest return on investment since it creates a list of entirely qualified leads. In this method, a person opts-in as described above. They then receive an email from you with a link that they must click in order to be added to the email list. Even if they've provided a valid email address and checked a box saying that they allow you to email them, they **MUST** click the link in the email in order to prove that they really signed up for your email list.

The problem with this type of email list, as you can see, is that it is the slowest way to build your email list. Often, even asking people to complete one action to sign-up for an email list is too much, let

alone two actions! While many users are accustomed to the double opt-in process, they'll need to really want your email product to sign up and then confirm.

The benefits of this type of list building are significant. You're sure that you really are emailing to people who want to receive your email. While this won't completely eliminate your spam or deliverability problems, it will reduce them. If you're paying per email address sent to, it also means that you'll experience a higher ROI on each send because your list will have fewer junk addresses on it. Finally, if you do receive spam complaints, you can more effectively defend yourself against them by proving that the person double opted-in (It's good to create your confirmation link to log the email address, IP and date that it was clicked from.).

You'll need to decide at what point on the spectrum you're most comfortable. If simply growing the number of names on your list is the priority, Negative Opt-In is your best choice. The more qualified and "safe" you want your list to be, the more you should move up to an Opt-In or Double Opt-In list. Certainly, when renting or buying a list, you should ask if the list was originally Negative Opt-In, Opt-In or Double Opt-In.

7. The Big Image Myth: Why Your Email Newsletter Shouldn't Have Too Many Images?

In This Article... If you are just starting to send marketing email and need advice on how to design an email template, or if you are currently sending email but aren't satisfied with the click-through or deliverability results, this article explains why using large, graphic images in an email template will actually make your email less successful and detract from its overall performance.

Why Should I Second Guess Using Images?

Without a doubt, the number one error we see in companies who want to begin an Email Marketing program is the desire to design an email that looks exactly like a webpage or, worse yet, like a print postal mailer. In specific, Comm100 means designing an email that uses a lot of images within the email.

Comm100 understands why email designers like images. An email, just like any other piece of marketing material, looks better when it's got appealing images in it. If it displays properly to the end-user, it probably converts better as well. The problem, as you're about to see, is that most end-users won't see your graphics. As an added bonus, including graphics can get you sent to the spam folder.

How Do Images Get Included in Emails?

What you first need to understand is that there are two ways to send an image in an email. The first way ensures that the user will see the image, even if in some cases it's only as an attachment to the message. This method is called "embedding" the image. Essentially, you're attaching the image to the email. The plus side is that, in one way or another, the user is sure to get the image. The downside is two fold. Firstly, spam filters look for

large, embedded images and often give you a higher spam score for including them (Lots of spammers use images to avoid having the inappropriate content in their emails read by the spam filters.). Secondly, if you pay to send your email by weight or kilobyte, this increases the size of your message. If you're not careful, it can even make your message too big for the parameters of the email provider.

The second way to include images (and the far more common way) is the same way that you put an image on a web page. Within the email, you provide a url that is the reference to the image's location on your server, exactly the same way that you would on a web page. This has several benefits. Firstly, you won't get caught for spamming or for your message "weighing" too much because of the image. Secondly, you can make changes to the images after the email has been sent if you find errors in them. On the flip side, your recipient will need to actively turn on image viewing in their email client to see your images.

What Does It Mean When You Say "Have Image Viewing Turned On?"

Unfortunately, even as Comm100 speaks, image urls and image files are being used to plant viruses on computers and to collect information about people. For this reason, most email service

providers, such as Hotmail, Yahoo! and Gmail, set the default status on delivered messages to block images.

What a user sees when this happens is a large, white, empty space (with your image alt or title text if you've included it) and often a message to right click to download the images. Most people spend less than a minute scanning an email while they decide whether to read it or delete it. If you're email is full of images, they don't see much that allows them to make a decision. Chances are, unless users are already very loyal to your brand and interested in your content, you are about to get deleted.

Email users can overwrite the "images off" default in their email, but most of them don't. Most studies and surveys reveal that anywhere from 40% to 60% of users read email with the images turned off. Any way you cut it, that's almost half of your recipient base who won't see your email with the images as you intended. And that's not even counting mobile phone users!

How Much Do Mobile Phone Users Impact Image Viewing?

Increasingly, mobile phone users impact your email viewing greatly. Recent studies suggest that up to 20% of your users check their mail on text-only mobile phone applications. If your email is a single image, or is based on a great deal of images, you won't resolve to those users at all.

So, What Should I Do?

Surprisingly, Comm100 would like to tell you that you should use images. You should just use very few of them and be careful where you put them.

Images definitely have a marketing impact. A portion of your viewers will see them and turn them on. If you just follow these basic steps with images, you'll be fine. Also, remember that you can do a lot of things just using html tables and colors that will make your email visually appealing AND deliverable.

The Less Than 25% Rule: No more than 25% of the real estate in your email template should be image-based. You want at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the email to be readable without images.

Alt and Title Text: This is the text that is contained within your image url that appears when the image doesn't load (and in some cases appears when your mouse hovers over a graphic). Having this text beneath your graphics is important because you can still convey the message that was in the graphic even if the graphic doesn't load.

No Trapped Messages! The basic rule is this: "If it's important that your readers know a piece of information, it cannot be trapped in an image." All important information, such as price, product title, value proposition and expiration date, must be in html text. This includes "Click to order" buttons. If those are images, you'll have users looking for where they're supposed to click, and possibly not finding it. Those should be html buttons.

Images are an important part of any marketing campaign or collateral. However, email presents challenges in that you can't control how the end product displays to the user in all cases. It's better to have an email that can be delivered and seen by the user than to have one that looks fantastic ... but only when it's loaded on your computer screen and not when it's in an inbox!

8. Is Email Right for My Product: What Types of Consumers Respond Best to Email Marketing?

In This Article... If you're considering implementing an Email Marketing program but aren't sure if it's really worth the time or effort, Comm100 helps you explore whether your product, website or demographic is ideally suited for Email Marketing in this article. Comm100 then gives advice on how to find the right email message for your market.

Is Email Right for Everybody?

As you're evaluating whether or not to launch an email marketing element to your business, you may be wondering if your product, customer base or industry segment is the type that will be responsive to email marketing.

The short answer is that every consumer will respond to the right email message, but, if you're thinking that certain types of segments perform better, then you're right.

Without a doubt, the hospitality and travel industry and the entertainment industry receive the highest delivery, open and click-through rates of any industries, according to the Harte-Hanks Postfuture Index. For all industries combined, the average open rate to an opt-in list is above 20% and click-through rates are 5% or more. What this shows is that, across all industries, users will respond to email marketing. However, there are some factors that you should keep in mind.

Is Your Demographic an Online Demographic?

One of the largest factors in determining how responsive your user list will be to email marketing is simply this: "How prevalent is it to purchase your product or service online versus going to a brick

and mortar location?" While both types of consumers respond to email marketing, they respond in different ways and to different techniques.

If your product or service is primarily online and consumers typically purchase or research it online, then email marketing is a natural and somewhat easier fit for you. Travel services are an excellent example of this. By far, the majority of travel purchases made each year are made online. This is one of the reasons that the travel and tourism industry's email marketing campaigns perform as well as they do. People operate in a primarily online environment for that sector. However, in order to make email marketing relevant even if your product or service is primarily an online product or service, you'll still need to follow a few key steps.

Keep Offers and Content Fresh: Just because a person purchases your product or service online, it doesn't mean that they want to be told every week about the quality of your brand and your top selling product. If they think that they're reading the same content every time you send an email, they'll stop opening!

Link Directly to Product Pages: Promoting a product and then linking to your homepage from the email just leaves users having to search

through your site and often giving up on ever finding the product that they wanted to begin with. Link straight through to the product page for the specific item that you're talking about.

Personalize and Segment: Inboxes are crowded places these days, and people spend less time in them. Use personalization in your emails and segment your list based on user behavior.

What if my product or service is primarily purchased offline?

You're still safe to use email marketing! You just need to structure it differently. A great example of this is the clothing industry. People often prefer to purchase clothing in stores so that they can try it on. But you can still incentivize them to be interested in your email in several ways.

If you have a brick and mortar store, send them to it! Include printable coupons for your brick and mortar locations within the email. Make sure you mention those coupons in the subject line to increase your click-through rate.

If you're online and offline, promote the benefits and offers: Even if something is primarily purchased in stores, there are benefits to purchasing it online (convenience, uniqueness) that you can promote. Also, offers are even more important here.

Purchasers of products that are often purchased offline will be receptive to email if there's something in the email that they truly want. Just be sure and provide that to them!

Is this all true for B2B as well?

It is, though be aware that B2B email is much more difficult and you should expect slightly lower open and click-through rates. Business decision makers have more crowded inboxes than an average consumer. Additionally, they spend time in their inboxes (or at least the inbox of the email address that you're likely to have) differently than regular consumers. A B2C consumer is in his or her inbox during leisure time, often looking for activities to create interest. A B2B consumer is in his or her inbox during work hours, usually conducting business, and must be even more incentivized to open your email in the rush of other activities.

B2B email marketing obviously works as it's the staple of many a marketing campaign, but you'll need to be even more diligent about subject lines, contents and standing out as something exciting.

There's an email solution that will appeal to just about any type of customer in any type of demographic. You just need to be dedicated to taking the time to find out what that is and optimize it. Take the time to think about what your customers would really want to see in their inboxes. And take the time to test several different ideas and see what users will really respond to. Email is a key customer communication touch point regardless of what type of customer it is!

9. Timing is Everything: What is the Best Day of the Week to Send an Email to Your Customers?

In This Article... If you've implemented an Email Marketing program and want to optimize how many people open and click-through your email, knowing what day of the week and at what time of day to send your email is a key element to improving metrics. Sending on the wrong day can impact your email performance negatively. In this article Comm100 will explain when the best days are to send email and what the best time of day to send is.

Is Timing Really Important?

If only sending a successful email campaign were as simple as putting together a compelling offer, a great creative, an enticing subject line and sending your message. But it's not! In the quest to get your users to open an email, the day and time that you send an email is also incredibly important. Continue reading to find out when is best for you to send.

The Open Rate Tail: Don't Send Day-Of Emails

The first thing that you need to know is that, while a large portion of your recipients are going to open your email the day that they receive it, not all of them will. As people visit their inboxes less frequently during the day and instead hit social networks, the number of days it takes between sending an email and a user reading it has grown. It used to be a commonly accepted metric that a marketing email or newsletters had a three day "open tail". These days, most people allow up to five days for stragglers to open emails. This is important to you if you send emails that relate to specific events. For example, an email about a prediction on a sports event or last minute tickets to a concert. Sending the email the day of the event means that, by the time a significant portion of your audience reads the email, the event

will be over. At a minimum, send your email three days before the target event. If you want to be extra safe, increase that to five days.

What Time Is It?

It's not between 8:00am and 9:00am EST if you're an email marketer! According to a Pivotal Veracity study, early morning email delivery has the lowest open rates. This makes sense since the first time most people check their email is when they arrive at work, and the common habit is to delete anything unimportant in order to reduce clutter before the day starts.

If you're emailing in North America, the vast majority of the population leaves in the Eastern Standard time zone. Subsequently, it's best to focus your email send time on hitting that particular time zone (unless you have the capability to segment your list by geographic location and send in staggered sends).

While metrics are different for everybody, as a general rule, the best open rates tend to be seen in emails that are sent around lunch time (noon or 1:00pm) EST. This also makes logical sense as people tend to relax a bit with their inboxes at lunch.

The Day Dilemma

There are a few fast and easy rules about the best days to send. But as Comm100 will discuss at the conclusion of this article, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't test to find out if they hold true for you.

Monday Blues: Monday's are considered the worst day to send mass email if open rate is important to you (and, of course, open rate is important to you). The logic, again, involves the theory that most people spend most of their inbox time at work. When you come into work on a Monday, you instantly start deleting anything that seems like junk or unimportant email so that your inbox isn't as overwhelming to you. This theory has been backed up by numbers in many email marketing studies. Unless your users have proven to exhibit a different pattern or you have a compelling reason to send on Monday, avoid Monday sends!

Weekend Warriors: It's also a fact that internet activity in general reduces on weekends. This may be because people spend more time with their families, get outdoors more or are just burnt out from all their enforced online time during the week. Almost every online metric category slips on the

weekends, and that includes email opens. Avoid big weekend blasts.

Midweek is the Best Week: Most studies support that sending email on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday will yield the best results. So, if you boil it down, you want to send your email campaign on a midweek day in the afternoon.

Rules Are Meant to Be Broken: Make Sure These Hold True for You

Despite all of the rules above, the number one rule of Email Marketing is "Test. Then test again." Your particular user base may respond very well to Monday or weekend emails. Maybe you have a lot of mothers who are up early and online, opening emails. The only way to know for sure is to test various send times and establish the best practices for your own list. Even within your list, different list segments may respond in different ways.

If you follow the "Midweek, Midday" rule, you will certainly get decent response rates. Then you can build on that by running some tests to figure out if there may be a more optimized time to send to your email list! Just be sure you remember to keep track of what you sent when!

10. Keep ‘em Clicking: Seven Tips to Improve Click-Through Rates

In This Article... If you’ve been sending marketing email already but aren’t satisfied with your click-through rate, or if you’re designing your first html email template and want to make sure that it’s optimized for the best possible click-through results, this article covers seven best practices for getting the most click-through response from your email sends.

Why is Click-Through Important?

You’ve mastered getting your email into the inbox, and you’ve found subject lines and an email list that will respond to and open your emails. Congratulations! You’ve made great progress. What’s the next step? It’s to get the people who have opened your email to actually click-through your email to your product. After all, the entire purpose of your email is to drive traffic to your website or landing page.

You’d be surprised how a few small changes can really optimize the click-through rate to your website. Here, Comm100 will break down the lucky seven things that you can do to help ensure that your click-through rate is just about as good as it possibly could be.

1. Make Sure that Your Links Look Like Links

It’s very easy to begin to think that your links should look neat and stylized, especially if you have a tightly controlled brand style on your website. However, your links will get clicked the most if they look like links and people can easily identify them as links. At a minimum, every link in your email should be underlined, like a standard link, so that it is easily identifiable to the user visually as a link. Though it may be outside of the scope of your brand guidelines, consider making the links in your email the standard blue link color.

What’s the reason for this? Some emails will strip out your style scripts anyway. Making your links standard blue will make them obvious links to users in any context.

2. Make Sure There is a Link Above the Fold

This is the same rule as applies with landing pages. In the case of an email, however, “Above the Fold” actually means within the first inch and a half of the email. Over half of all people who read (or just scan) your email will do so in a horizontally-oriented email preview pane. That means that you have less than two inches of space to convince them to click something. If you fill up the top inch and a half or two inches of your email with an image and text and no obvious links, you may miss your entire opportunity to get a user to click through to your website or landing page. Even if it means less use of image and a harder selling text style, make sure you get at least one obvious link in the top inch and a half of your email. Otherwise, many users will never even see a link to click!

3. Don’t Trap Links in Images

Comm100 has talked previously about how using images to convey important messages in email means that many of your readers will never see the message that you want to convey. This rule applies to “click-through buttons” as well. It’s true that, in a normal web environment, using a graphic button to tell somebody to “enter” or “click” or

“submit: is the most effective way to get a response. This is not true in email. If you use a graphic button, half of your users will only see the button’s alt or title text. Alt and title text is not as compelling as a large font, brightly colored text link. Instead of graphic buttons, use either large font text links or create an html button. A good coder can create an html button that is both visually appealing and always visible in your email (whereas a graphic won’t be!).

4. TELL People to Click

Comm100 has already talked about making sure that your links are not too visually subtle, but this is true for the text you choose to use around your links as well. Again, this isn’t a webpage and you have limited time to get somebody to click. So, rather than using subtle text strings, make sure you are using call to action and order text such as “Click here to...” or “Click this link.” The one thing that you want to be careful of is that you don’t do this too much, because spam filters don’t like emails that have dozens of large, bolded, “click here” links. But you want at least a couple of links that obviously tell your users where and what to click.

5. Use Alt and Title Text Effectively

Just in case you’ve had a brain freeze moment, alt and title text are the text snippets that appear underneath images and that are seen either when the image doesn’t load or when a user holds their mouse over the image. You should use both alt and title text fields since different browsers read them differently. The important part of what Comm100 just said that you need to remember is that alt and title tags appear when images don’t load! So not only should those text fields repeat any messages in those images, but they should

also be used to also say “Click here for this offer” or “Click for more information.” Every alt or title text field is an opportunity to encourage a click-through.

6. Use LOTS of Links

There is also just a piece of simple math that goes into optimizing your click-through rate. It goes like this: The more opportunities that you give users to click, the more likely that they are to click. If a user has to read through several paragraphs of text to get to a link, they may not get that far. Or they may not care by the time they get to the link. Every text block that you include in an email should include one link. And every image should be a link. It’s just math! More links means more opportunities for a user to click, which means more click-through.

7. Double Check Your Text Version

Remember that you should always be sending a corresponding text version with your html email. And remember that that text version will wipe out all of your html links. Make sure that you go through your text version and manually put in the url that users need to visit. It should sound like this “Visit this url (insert full url) to see this product.” If your url is very long and complicated, you may want to consider setting up a shorter url and then redirecting it to the more complicated url after a user types it in.

Those seven tips will, without fail, improve your click-through rate. Just be sure to check your email in a pre-send spam rater to make sure that you haven’t gone overboard with any of these techniques. It’s true that in some cases your email won’t look as pretty when you’re following these rules, but Comm100 can assure you that, from a click-through perspective, it will perform better!

11. Open Rate Woes: Why Not to be Fooled by Low Open Rate Numbers

In This Article... If you've implemented an Email Marketing program but aren't satisfied with or are confused by low open rate numbers, Comm100 explains in this article why traditional open rate metrics don't tell the true number of people who opened your email. Comm100 then explores how to use open rate numbers to improve your campaign's performance even if the open rate itself isn't completely accurate.

What is Open Rate and Why is It Important?

Open rate is the number of people (in percentage form) who opened and looked at an email. It is considered to be one of the most important performance metrics of Email Marketing because it ultimately tells you how much your audience cared about your email and how many people looked at it. You'll see many statistics about what your open rate should be. Often, what you'll be told is that, for an opt-in house list, your open rate should be approximately 20%. And that's great, if your open rate is being tracked reliably. Unfortunately, it's less and less possible to track open rates correctly, and, increasingly, the metric needs to be used in a relative term. Let's first discuss why open rate metrics aren't reliable any more and then discuss how you can make open rate useful to you as a metric.

The Imperfect Nature of the Open Rate

To understand why an open rate is an unreliable way to track email performance, you need to understand how an open rate is tracked. A small one pixel by one pixel graphic is inserted into the email that you send. Then, each time the pixel is loaded, the email registers as having been opened. In some advanced cases, the pixel is tied to the recipient and is only counted once. But the point is

that the graphic needs to load in order for the email to get counted as having been opened. There are three problems with this tracking method.

The first problem is that for the open to register, your user must have the graphics loaded in the email. As Comm100 has previously discussed, many email providers and users never load the graphics in an email. Without the graphics loaded, it's entirely possible that your email has been read but that the open or reading of the email has never been registered.

The second problem is users who choose to receive their email in a text only format. These users will read your email, but because the version of the email that they are reading doesn't include any html, it also doesn't include any images. Again, the opening of the email is never recorded.

Finally, and increasingly, the number of users who read their email on a mobile phone will only see the text version of your email. And, of course, seeing only the text version means not having an image, thus not having a pixel graphic, and thus not having an open recorded even if they do read.

It's a generally accepted metric in the Email Marketing world that open rate reporting can be off from anywhere from 11% to 35%. That's a lot! So while it may look like nobody is opening your email,

it could actually be true that your email is doing quite well.

Three Ways to Make Open Rate a Relevant Metric for You

Once you accept that your open rate really isn't your open rate, there are some ways to make the metric useful to you regardless.

Extrapolate the Real Success by Comparing to Better Metrics: Open rate is not a variable metric these days. However, click-through rates and (if your tracking is set up correctly) conversions to sales or sign-ups are hard numbers, which means that you do know how successful your email was by looking at them. You can work backwards from those metrics. Find your most successful emails in terms of click-through and conversions and then see what the open rate was on those emails. You'll be able to then target what a good "relative" open rate for your email program is. It's not a perfect number because factors like offer and creative assist with the click-through once an email is opened, but it can give you an idea of what to aim for.

Make the Open Rate Relative to Other Email Sends: You may not know what your true open rate is, but you know what the relative open rate between emails that you've sent is. If you sent an email on the first Friday of the month that got a 25% open rate and an email on the second Friday of the month that got a 10% open rate, then something that you did in the first email send was better. It

may have been the offer, the subject line, the time of day or even just that people have more money at the beginning of the month. Whatever it was, you know that your open rate for that email was a better performance, and you should repeat what you did there in other opportunities to improve your overall open rate moving forward.

Use A/B Testing: It's true that not everybody loves setting up a complicated A/B test, but with email it's fairly easy to just split your list in half and send two different emails to see which one performs better. Comm100 certainly suggests, at a minimum, sending two different subject lines to learn which one will perform better to generate opens. Doing an A/B email test with two factors and then seeing which one fared better in opens can draw value from the open rate metric by showing you which strategy will work better in future emails.

It's not as though email open rates are an entirely useless statistic or metric. However, they're not used the same way that they used to be because they don't log numbers that are reliable any more. Knowing how what you've done with your email has impacted its success or failure is the only way to make your email campaigns better. Use open rate metrics in comparison or as relative numbers to improve your campaign, but don't be discouraged if your email tracking software says that your open rates are very low percentages! It's likely that they aren't as bad as it seems.

12. Designing Your Email Template: 5 Keys to Keep in Mind

In This Article... If you're considering implementing an Email Marketing program but don't know where to start with your html email template design, or if you're currently emailing but feel you're not getting the results you want, Comm100 explains in this article five key points for optimizing the design of your html email template.

Email Template Design: Not as Simple as it Sounds

There's a lot of misinformation out in the world about the best way to design an email template. If you're using a third-party email service that provides templates, that's a great starting point. However, for reasons of both branding and for those of you not sending your html email through a third-party provider, designing an html email template can come with some unique challenges. While Comm100 can't guide you step by step through every inch of your template, Comm100 can give you a list of five key things to make sure are happening in your html email template.

1. Design for a Horizontal Preview Pane

The reality is that most people are going to view your email in a horizontal preview pane, either in Outlook, Hotmail or Yahoo! According to a study by MicroMass Communications, the average size of that horizontal preview pane will be 638x86 pixels.

Yes, you read that correctly. Most people won't even see the first 100 pixels of your email.

What this means is that your template should not be more than 638 pixels wide (Comm100 usually recommends that you stick to 600 pixels) and that you need to make sure that you've got value propositions and calls to action within the first 100

pixels. This means that you may want to revisit that nice header graphic. It also means that, if you're using that header graphic, you'd better make sure it has effective Alt and Title text layered behind it.

You may actually want to take a screen shot of your Outlook inbox and layer your email in on top of it in Photoshop to see how it presents! But any way you break it down, you need to assume that you have 600x100 pixels or less to convince a user to keep reading your email.

2. Maximize with Two Columns

It's unlikely that, in the average of 54 seconds somebody is taking to look at your email, they will scroll very far down. One way to maximize the amount of information (and links) that they see is to use a two column format. Comm100 recommends a 200 pixel side column and a 400 pixel main column. The side column will allow you to provide smaller segments of information and navigational links. The larger column will be where the main content of your email lives.

There's some debate about where the side column should live in terms of the right or left side of the email template. Comm100 thinks that the left side is a better optimization, because no matter how narrow the preview pane your user is using (unless they are viewing in a very small, vertical preview pane, which is unlikely), with a left side 200 pixel column and the larger 400 pixel column on the

right side, they will be exposed to the content in both columns.

However, if your table building and html is not extremely clean, the left hand column can create viewing problems and push the right hand column out of the screen. Placing the smaller column on the right ensures that your main column and content will always be seen.

Try both, and test them into various email clients to see!

3. Define Images and Links!

Another thing that you'll need to remember is that email clients are far less forgiving than a web browser with html. Therefore, you need to be extra careful with how your developer or coder makes your html email template.

The size of every image needs to be defined. This means that in the html code, the image reference needs to say what the width and height of the image is. Otherwise, you could see your layout break. And as we discussed in the article about images, make sure you're using Alt and Title tags.

Also, links need to be "absolute" rather than "relative". Chances are that on your website, you use relative links. This means that you don't always have the full url of the link in the html code. But in an html email template, you'll need to use the full url.

4. We Know It Sounds like a Broken Record, But Limit Your Use of Images

This one is so important that Comm100 wrote an entire article about it! So Comm100 won't go into it in great detail here, but it is one of the most important things that you need to remember when designing an email template. Keep the use of images to a minimum and use html and formatted text to convey your message.

Images look great, it's true, but they can cause many problems with your Email Marketing campaign's performance.

5. Keep Things Short and Simple

It doesn't matter how great your content is, people are not going to read your email! They're going to scan it, and they're going to scan it in under a minute. Instead of providing them with large chunks of content, design your email template to include large headlines and then shorter sections of content that link to your website or destination page.

Using bulleted lists can also help you with this. The key is to not overwhelm people with too much text or to create an email template where people are required to read in large chunks in order to get the point that you're conveying.

There's value in your content, it's true. But an email is not a web page, and how people behave in their inbox is different than how they behave, say, on a blog. Keep your content short, sweet, to the point and use it to drive clicks rather than provide information.

Bonus! HTML Tips!

Also remember that email clients are picky about how they read html. Here are some tips for coding your html email template in a way that will resolve well in most email clients.

Use HTML tables to control the design layout. Do NOT use pure CSS layouts: that just hold up in an email environment

Use **inline** CSS to control other presentation elements

CSS style declarations must appear below the body tag

Do NOT use CSS shorthand: instead of using the abbreviated style rule font: 12px/16px Arial, Helvetica, break this shorthand into its individual properties: font-family, font-size, and line-height.

Use spans and divs VERY sparingly to achieve specific effects, use HTML tables do the bulk of the layout work.

Designing an html email template can be a challenge, but the good news is that once you have one that you like and that delivers consistently to the inbox, you can reuse it over and over again. Take the time to design an appropriate template the first time, and you'll experience the benefits with all future sends!

13. Tests, Tests & More Tests: How to Optimize Your Emails Through a/b Testing

In This Article... If you've been sending to your email list for some time now but feel as though you could be getting better results, this article explains how running simple a/b tests can lead to improved open rates, click-through rates and conversions.

Testing and Email Marketing: Partners in Success

You've got your email campaign up and running, and now you want to make it even better. Or perhaps you've read some advice Comm100 has given and said "That's not right. I KNOW my audience would respond better to an image based email." For whatever reason, you're not convinced that your email is providing the best results, and you want to see if you can improve it. That's great, because Comm100 believes that marketing can always be improved.

One of the great benefits of Email Marketing is that it can make it extremely easy to run a/b tests on your marketing concepts, especially because it's somewhat easier to control keeping things random with email.

What is an a/b Test?

An a/b test is simply a test where you present one option to one randomized segment of your audience and a different option to the other segment. Then you see which one performs better. It's that simple.

It's common to perform an a/b test on a website, randomly serving different offers or creatives using a java script or Google Website Optimizer. However, email presents an alternative way to test things, without running the risk that a repeat visitor

to your website may see something different than they saw the first time and skew your response rate.

Setting up an email a/b test is simple. Just divide your email list into two parts, and send them two different emails. Each email has a different part of the test in it. The one that gets a better response will tell you what the better offer, creative or sending time to use in future campaigns is.

What Kinds of Things Should be Tested?

If it's anything that can impact the success of your email campaign in any way, then it should be tested! This includes:

- Subject lines
- Day of week of the send
- Time of day of the send
- Offer or email content
- Email creative and layout
- Html template vs. text email
- Headlines within the email
- From address
- Concepts such as personalization, email tone, etc.

The list above is fairly comprehensive. However, your industry and the end goal of your email campaign may mean that there are other factors that you want to test.

Common Mistakes with Email a/b Testing

There are some common pitfalls to email a/b testing that you'll want to avoid.

Make sure your list is truly random: To do this, we recommend taking your email list and putting every other name in one test group. A good coder can write a script to do this pretty easily. One of the most common mistakes we see is that mailers will take their list, just divide it in half and then use those two halves as their a group and their b group. The problem with this strategy is that it means that one half of your list will be comprised of older sign-ups. That portion of the list will always perform in an inferior way to the newer segment of the list.

Also, once you have split your list into two, do a quick check of each half of the list as well. If one half has a predominance of, for example, Hotmail addresses, then you may experience deliverability issues with only one half of your list. That will impact the end results of your test. In general, pulling every other name and splitting your list that way will give you the best randomized representation.

Only test one thing at a time: Another common mistake is to try to test more than one thing at a time. For example, we've seen people try to test a subject line and an image within the email on the same test. The only way to accurately know if the item you're testing is, in fact, the item that created the change in results is to limit what you're testing to one item. If you test more than one item at a time, you can't properly determine what impact

each element had on performance. As tempting as it may be to try to collect more data in less time, using more than one test factor will make that data less valuable, less accurate and less usable.

Don't over analyze: If you've set your test up correctly by making sure your list is completely random and limiting your test factor to just one element, then the results are the results. You've just learned something. Don't muddy the waters with a lot of "what if" and "but". The beauty of a true random a/b test is that the results are typically quite conclusive. Remember, in the numbers game of Email Marketing, it only takes a small percentage increase to make a big difference.

What to Do With Your Results

If you've never completed an a/b tests to your audience before, then the first thing to do is to start saving the results. After you've been running tests in all areas of email optimization, you'll have enough data to create a best practice manual that you can follow in the future for creating the best headlines, subject lines, email creatives, offers and more. Then you'll be sure that you're running the best holistic email program that you can.

After you've got a best practice manual, however, there's no reason to stop testing. The context of your audience will continue to grow and change, as will things like price point acceptance for your product, competitor activity and more. Marketing and email marketing in particular follow just one rule: Test, then test again.

14. Managing Your Email List: What are the Best Ways to Handle Bad Addresses & Unsubscribers?

In This Article... If you've got a large and active email list and have previously been emailing to them, even if you've only recently started, Comm100 explains in this article the best practices of managing the names on your list in order to optimize delivery and response rates.

Why is Managing my Email List Important?

In the constant struggle to get your email into your subscribers' inboxes, having bad addresses and not properly managing users who unsubscribe can quickly add up to a deliverability problem. Properly managing the non-viable emails on your list from the very beginning, as well as throughout your Email Marketing campaign, can improve not only deliverability but also give you a more realistic view of your Email Marketing stats.

What Should My Email List Metrics Look Like?

The two metrics that you need to concern yourself with when evaluating the quality of email names on your list are the bounce rate and the unsubscribe rate.

Bounce Rate: The bounce rate is the number of email addresses (in percentage form) that you emailed to that were returned to your email server as undeliverable. This could be because the email addresses were mistyped when they were submitted, are deactivated email accounts (or accounts that never existed to begin with), or are email addresses where the user has not checked email in so long that the inbox is full to its maximum capacity. Your bounce rate should never be more than 20%, and that would be considered to be the high end of the scale. You would really

prefer, on a house list, to see a bounce rate of less than 10%. Bounce rate is important in terms of making sure that you don't get flagged as spam because most spam filters will look to see how many bad email addresses an email was sent to. The more bad addresses you send to, the more the spam filters assume that you're using a bought, stolen or phished list, and the higher your spam score will be.

Unsubscribe Rate: The unsubscribe rate is the number of users (in percentage form) who unsubscribed from your email program when they received a particular email. If you are using an opt-in or double-opt-in house list, this should be no more than 3%, and 3% would be considered high. You are really looking for an unsubscribe rate of less than 1%. Beyond that, the message is that your users don't like your content and you should begin to revisit what you're including in your email.

How Do I Prevent High Bounce Rates?

Preventing high bounce rates is just as important as any other element of your email program. As previously mentioned, high bounce rates can mean problems with your email getting flagged as spam. But there is also a cost factor. If you're sending email from a system that charges you by the weight of the email or the number of email addresses that you send to, every bad address that you continue to send to will cost you money and impact the ROI of your email campaign. There

are three primary methods for controlling bounce rate.

Check for Email Validity at the Time of Sign-Up:

Make sure that form on your website where users enter their email, whether that's during a purchase and registration process or on a Newsletter sign-up field itself, is checking for proper email formatting. At a minimum, your email collection script should check for the format something@something.com. However, some scripts can get more detailed and look for common words like "test" or "fake" in the email to throw up warning flags. If you are using a double-opt-in system, you are protecting even further from bad email addresses ever actually being included on your list because the email address needs to actually be delivered to before the customer is ever actually added to the list.

Prune Your List Regularly: "Pruning" an email list means removing bad names, usually after they have been returned as undeliverable a pre-set number of times. Depending on how clean you want to make your list, you can set your pruning parameters to anything from 3 undeliverable emails to 10. Most third party email sending providers offer an automatic pruning option that you can control the number of returns on before a name is removed. If you're not using a system with an automatic pruning option, we strongly recommend having one of your developers create a script that tracks and removes undeliverable addresses.

Periodic Re-Opt-Ins: This measure is fairly extreme and can make your list too small and targeted, but if you're paying to send email by the number of addresses sent to, it may be a good option for you. Some email senders choose to periodically send an email once a year or so to everybody on their list who they can see has not clicked through, or opened, or subsequently purchased from an email send. Recipients are then asked to opt back in by clicking a link, and, if they

don't, their email is removed from the list. The pro of this is that you are sure you are only paying to send email to very engaged users. The con is that you may remove names from your list of lapsed members who at some point would have, in fact, been receptive to your email offer.

How Do I Prevent High Unsub Rates?

Well, the truth of this is that the only way that you can prevent high unsub rates is to use opt-in list gathering and then provide exceptional email content that your users really want to receive. However, there are some other elements to managing your unsubs that you should keep in mind.

Keep Unsubbing Easy: There will certainly be marketers out there who tell you that you should make the unsub link within your email as difficult to use and find as possible so that people have to stay on your list. This is wrong. The reason that it's wrong is because email providers offer a simple option for people who can't find the unsub link: Just mark the email as spam and you'll never see anything from the sender again! Since the last thing that you want is for somebody to mark you as spam, making it easy and simple for them to unsub is your best move.

Offer Unsub Options: If you offer multiple email lists, give users the option to unsubscribe from all emails OR just the individual email list. If you do this, you may be able to keep a user engaged on one list even if they've lost interest in another list.

Use a Great Unsub Confirmation Page: Don't be pushy, but using a great, engaging unsub page to try to re-interest users in signing back up or staying on the email list can actually save sign-ups for you. We think that the best unsub page we've ever seen in our lives is right here:
<http://www.groupon.com/las-vegas/unsubscribed>

Be CAN-SPAM Compliant: We've discussed this in a previous article, but CAN-SPAM laws actually govern how to handle unsubs quite explicitly. Make sure that you're compliant!

Process Unsubs Quickly: You want to remove users who have unsubscribed from your list as quickly as possible. While CAN-SPAM gives you an extended period of time, the reality is that if you don't remove these users immediately and they subsequently receive an extra email from you while they are waiting to be removed, they will mark you as spam.

Should You Use an Unsub Confirmation Email?

This is a highly debated question. When a person unsubs from your email, should you generate an email to them confirming that they've been

removed? There is data to suggest both sides of this (to send or not send). We personally don't recommend it. If you're trying to get them to re-engage, do it on the unsub confirmation page. Once people say that they don't want to receive email from you, they usually don't want to receive email from you!

List management is a critical component of Email Marketing that is often overlooked in favor of focusing on acquisition, email creative and activity tracking. However, keeping your list clean of users who shouldn't be on it has benefits that can't be overlooked, and which are elementally important to successful email marketing.

15. Right Message Right Person: What is list segmentation and how can you optimize it?

In This Article... If you've got a larger or active email list that you've been marketing to but you want to improve conversion results from that list, Comm100 explains in this article how to segment your list into smaller, more targeted segments in order to drive higher conversions.

The Two Types of List Management

There are two phases to Email Marketing list management, essentially. The first segment is acquiring a list of good, engaged users. The second segment is managing that list to optimize it. We've already discussed how managing bad email addresses and users who want to unsubscribe from the list can optimize your efforts. Here, we'll talk about how segmenting your list can yield better results from your email campaigns.

What is list segmentation?

In short, list segmentation is creating smaller lists, or segments, from your larger list. This, however, can be done in many ways. For example, let's say that you have an email list of 1000 names. 500 of those people have previously purchased a purple pillow from you, and 500 of them have not. Sending one email to the 500 people who previously purchased a purple pillow and offering them a discount on a matching blanket and a separate email to the 500 people who haven't purchased the purple pillow that offers a discount when the blanket and pillow are purchased together will yield a better result than sending the same email to all of your users with a more generic offer.

The basic definition is that list segmentation is the process of pulling out portions of your list who are

most likely to respond to an offer and then giving them that offer.

What are some good things to think about when defining list segments?

In reality, the best way to segment your list is going to be completely unique to you, but there are some common ways to look at splitting your list up.

User State: Whether a customer has actively purchased or interacted with you in the last week, last month or last year can impact the type of offer, email and creative that you want to use. It's common to send less generous offers to active customers and larger offers to try to stimulate activity out of lapsed or inactive customers.

Purchasing History: What types of products a customer has purchased in the past can tell you a lot about what kind of offer or email they will respond to. Creating list segments based on similar purchase histories can allow you to create very targeted and successful emails.

Customer Value: How much a customer has spent with you, the average amount of their order size, or how profitable they've been for you is also a common list segmentation. More valuable customers, or customers who spend more money don't necessarily need more generous offers, but they should be spoken to in email in a way that makes them feel important.

Geographic Region: One of the most common methods for list segmentation, splitting your list out by state, or larger geographic region, can allow you to use lingo, references and even graphics that create regionalized emotional responses.

Of course, depending on your business and what data you collect about those on your email list, there are many other logical possibilities for segmentation.

How Do I Get My List Split?

Unfortunately, there's no simple way to create list segmentation unless you've built a fairly robust in-house database. This is a worthwhile expenditure of time and effort, however, because targeted marketing (of any kind) is always the best marketing. If you're just creating your user base now, be sure to build in query tools for data fields that you may want to create segments from. If you've already built a database, any good developer can extract the information you want with an SQL query as long as you've saved the customer information that you want.

What Are My Next Steps?

If you haven't been segmenting your list previously, we'd suggest the following as a way to get started.

- Have a team brainstorm session to think of all of the different groups of customers that you may have
- Then take those groups and come up with lists of ideas about how they should be spoken to and what offers or content would be most relevant to them
- Select the easiest segment to extract from your client list or database and then test sending a smaller email just to them.

Always compare the open and click-through rates of your list segments to the open and click-through rates when you send to your entire mass list. If the targeted segments are not doing better, then you've selected the segment, the offer or the content poorly.

While Email Marketing is, at base, a numbers game, getting the most out of the list that you have requires sending the most targeted messages possible. This is even more important currently, when people's inboxes are cluttered and they spend less time inside of them as they visit social networks with time that used to be spent emailing. Making sure that the email you put in a user's inbox is something specific to them so that they'll want to open it is of huge importance these days. Once you have your mass email program under control, list segmentation is the next key to success.

16. The Social Buzz: Is Email Marketing being replaced by social media?

No!

In This Article... If you're considering implementing an Email Marketing program but aren't sure if your resources would be better spent expanding a social media programs, or if you're considering decreasing the amount of email you send in order to focus more on social media, this article explores whether or not social media is really "killing" email.

The Rise of Social Media

Before the rise of the mass social media networks, communicating with your users or customers was a lot easier. Most of them read email, and they read it frequently. However, now people admittedly spend less time in their inbox and more time on social networks. As a result, many marketers have shifted their focus to social network marketing to the detriment of their email programs. In this article, we'll explore why social networks haven't replaced email and shouldn't alter your email marketing strategy.

The Numbers

Prompt Communications of Boston recently completed a study that revealed that social networks, and Facebook in particular, are replacing email as the most popular way to stay in touch with friends. 96% of respondents regularly use Facebook to connect with friends, followed by text messaging at 93% and email at 91%.

But that doesn't mean that people aren't going into their inboxes. Email is still the primary communications tool for work and office related communications. Email is also where people receive their receipts and purchase confirmations for online purchases. People do go into their inboxes, often daily, to transact in non-personal ways. While in their inboxes, people are still able to receive, and often are receptive to, your email

marketing campaign. There are some very compelling reasons to keep an emphasis on your email marketing program.

Monetizing From a Social Network vs. Monetizing via Email

One of the most important reasons to keep your email marketing program in tact is because of the increased viability of direct response marketing via email versus via social networks. How users behave in both environments is very different. In an email environment, assuming that you can get the user to open your email, the user is then involved in a solo activity with no other distractions. He or she can read (by which we mean scan!) your email and be funneled into clicking links or taking other actions. Users are involved in the isolated activity of absorbing and responding to your message.

In a social network environment, however, it's much more difficult (though not impossible) to generate direct response actions or sales. Though Dell Computers reports great success with their Twitter campaign, most other businesses (and particularly mid-size and smaller business) have experienced challenges with converting social media users to revenue streams. It makes logical sense. In a social media environment, users are not as compelled to follow through with actions. They are in the network to explore information and, more importantly, interact with other users.

Convincing a social media user to become a receptive action taker rather than to read your message and then move on to the next opportunity to interact with other social network users is challenging, time consuming and takes a much longer tail to result in action.

Social Network Migration: Why Maintaining Your Email List is Key

Remember just a few short years ago when everybody believe that MySpace would last forever? Today, MySpace is struggling with revenue and much of its user base has migrated to other social networks. Moving your profile and following from one social network to another isn't challenging. As soon as their friends and contacts start to do it, users will follow them. Just because we believe that nobody would ever abandon Facebook or Twitter today, it doesn't mean that a better option, using better technology, won't come along. And when it does, you'll need to build your social network audience from scratch again.

Conversely, while people do change email addresses, they do so infrequently and often keep the same email addresses for many years. In some cases, even if they change their email address, they'll still occasionally check their old address. Once you have an email database, though there will be attrition, you have a more reliable and long term method of contacting users.

Also, your house email list is a company asset. In the event that your exit strategy involves having your company purchased, the number of registered email addresses that you have on your house list can be factored into the overall value of your company.

There has yet to be a social network that has proven that it can withstand a decade of use, but many email providers have! Don't abandon your email list unless you're willing to take the risk

regarding having your social networking strategy impacted negatively by advancing technology.

Better Email Marketing is the Key

Don't fool yourself though, the fact that users spend less time in their inbox than they used to will absolutely impact your email marketing campaigns. You'll need to focus on four things to make email marketing in the social networking era work!

Relevant Offers: Inboxes are crowded, and users will want to clear them out quickly. You don't have the luxury of sending out non-compelling offers to users any more just to benefit from a small percentage response. Take the time to segment your list, study what offers your users respond to and then send only the best offers out via your email campaigns.

Great Subject Lines: Again, because inboxes are more crowded and people spend less time in them, deleting email without even reading it has become more common. Make sure that you spend time and effort on your subject line. You're competing with more email for fewer resources than you used to. The subject line is the most important step in the process these days!

High Deliverability: This should go without saying. Even if you didn't make it into the inbox, it used to be that people would occasionally scan through their spam or junk folders. This isn't the case any longer, so making sure that your sender reputation is clear and your messages are going into the inbox becomes even more important.

Longer Tail Offers and Content:: Because people go longer between checking their inboxes (sometimes days, sometimes even weeks), the ability to use email as a real-time marketing or communications strategy no longer exists. If you send an email that needs to be responded to within 24 hours, you'll see much lower response rates than you used to. Make offers (or events that your

email refers to) have at least a three day tail for taking action.

Social networks are not replacing email, but they are changing out people use it. Make sure your email strategy responds accordingly. Send good,

relevant, targeted emails to clean house-lists. You'll find that email still works best for pure ROI purposes and also comes with a number of other benefits that you shouldn't overlook.

17. Best Practices Checklist: Email Marketing Best Practices 101

In This Article... If you're considering implementing an Email Marketing program or are currently emailing but experiencing underperformance, Comm100 provides you in this article with a list of ten best practices that will assure improvement in your email marketing campaigns.

The Top Ten

Despite what you may hear, email marketing is a complicated process with many moving parts. But that doesn't mean that you can't have a successful email marketing program or campaign while keeping things relatively simple. Comm100 has narrowed down the ten best practices that you absolutely must remember. If you follow them, you certainly won't fail!

1. Make Sure That Your Email Has Many Obvious Links

The purpose of your email is to drive traffic to your landing page, product page or website. It's really that simple to define the main purpose of an email. Without driving clicks to your page or website, users can't convert to sign-ups or customers. The key to accomplishing this is, quite simply, capitalize on every moment where a user may feel compelled to click. Include lots of links (at least one per paragraph of text) and make sure that your links look like links. Using strong calls to action and even authoritative "click here" messaging will also help you.

Takeaway Message: It's a best practice to have many links and to make sure that those links are obvious to the user.

2. Minimize Your Use of Images

We've covered this in great detail in a previous article, but always keep in mind that an email is not

a print mail piece. Many (if not most) of your recipients will not see the images included in your email, which means that every image you include can be wasted space. Use well-coded html instead of image heavy design. Never send an email that is simply one big image and certainly don't put any messaging in an image that a user must see to complete the action you want from an email (i.e. "click here" or "order now" messages).

Takeaway Message: Use images sparingly, rely on html to enhance the look of your email and never use an image to convey a critical or important message.

3. Make It Easy to Unsubscribe

It may seem counter intuitive to make it easy for a user to leave your mailing list, but the other option is much less appealing. When users get frustrated while trying to figure out how to remove their email from your list, they eventually just start to flag your email as spam. Every user who notes your email as being spam counts against your sender reputation with email providers and makes it harder (and sometimes impossible) to get your email into the inbox instead of the junk folder.

Takeaway Message: Have clear, easy-to-find unsubscribe links that require minimal action from the user to complete the task of unsubscribing.

4. Follow Spam Tips From the Beginning and EVERY Time That You Send Email!

We've also covered in detail the best ways to avoid getting flagged as spam and removed from your users' inboxes, but we can't emphasize enough how important it is to follow those steps. More importantly, it's important to follow them from the beginning of your email marketing effort and to follow them every single time you send. We know that it's tempting to send a harder sales email that trends against some of our advice for staying out of the spam folder, but it only takes one email that looks like its high spam to keep you out of the inbox for weeks, months or years afterwards.

Takeaway Message: Even if it means your email isn't as effective as a sales tool, following all of the steps to avoid being flagged as spam is absolutely, unquestionably critical with every send.

5. Maximize Your Email Template Dimensions

You don't have a lot of space in a person's inbox to convey a message, and most of your users will be viewing your email in a preview pane with the images turned off. Make sure that your html email template isn't more than 600 pixels wide and that you clearly get your value proposition and at least one link into the first 100 pixels of height. It won't look as nice as putting a shiny header graphic up there, but it will yield better results. Also, consider a secondary column on the right or left hand side in order to get more information above the fold of an email preview pane!

Takeaway Message: Design for what your email will look like in a 600x200 pixel space without images loaded! How it looks in those dimensions with that restriction is how most users will see the final email.

6. Keep Your Text Short and Easy to Scan

Most users aren't going to read the full text of your email. They're going to scan it for key points that

they may be interested in. Keep your text short (very small paragraphs or bullets) and use font bolding and additional colors to highlight words or phrases that you know will be important to your users and clients. Too much text will get your email deleted just about as fast as anything, and it creates more risk for triggering spam filters.

Takeaway Message: Less is more! Content may drive the internet, but it doesn't improve email performance. Write concisely, use trigger and keywords and make sure that your most important messages are highlighted or bolded.

7. Keep Your Email List Clean

There's no value to not taking the time and making the effort to make sure that you're removing bad email addresses from your house list. Making sure that incorrectly formatted email addresses are caught when somebody signs up and then "pruning" addresses that are returned as undeliverable, non-existent or with full inboxes from your list before the next send isn't optional if you want to have a successful email marketing program. If your list starts to show a higher percentage of undeliverable email addresses, email providers will flag you as spam.

Takeaway Message: Even if it creates more work for you, make sure that you're pruning your list and removing bad emails from it. The result if you don't will put you in the spam folder!

8. Properly Use Alt Text, Title Text and Linking with Images

Because using images in email can create dead space, maximizing the code behind those images is critical. Make sure that ALL of your images have both alt text and title text as different browsers will read those two types of text differently (Alt text and title text are the text messages that appear when an image doesn't load or when somebody hovers

over an image with a mouse). Also, make sure that all of your images are actually links to your landing page or website. This way, at a minimum, your potential image dead space can still drive traffic to your destination.

Takeaway Message: Make sure that all of your images are properly coded. This means not only making sure that the image height and width is properly defined but also that the image has alt text, title text and is linked to a webpage or landing page.

9. Send Test Emails BEFORE You Send to Your Main List

There's nothing worse than sending an email and then finding out that it went right to the spam folder or that something in your email layout broke in Hotmail's email viewer or Outlook's preview pane. Before you send an email to your entire list, send a test version to a test account using each of the big email providers (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail/Live/MSN and any account using an Outlook client). If there are any significant segments of your list using another email provider, you'll want to include that in your test as well. If you catch any errors, there's still time to start disassembling your email and fixing them, or remove a problematic segment of your email list.

Takeaway Message: Catching an error in an email sent to a seed address is useless if it happens after you've already sent to the main list. Use your seed addresses to test send to and check

formatting and deliverability before you send to the main list.

10. Make Sure to Piggyback a Text Version of the Email

We've previously discussed how to decide if you should use an html email or a text only email, and our recommendation is that you use both. But, at a minimum, if you are using an html email you must piggyback a text only version of the email onto your send. A number of people do opt to view email as text only, and, increasingly, people are reading text-based email only on mobile phones.

Takeaway Message: Make sure, no matter what, that your html email has a piggybacked text email attached to it! It's that simple!

Bonus Tip! Always Ask Users to Add You to Their Contact List!

At every opportunity, remind users that they can be assured that they won't miss out on the valuable information that they love receiving from you if they add your send address to their email contacts list. The more people you get doing that, the better your deliverability will be!

These ten best practices won't make you a perfect email marketer, but they will certainly make you better than most! Just use these tips as a checklist when putting your email campaign together and you'll be fine!

18. The Email Content Quandary. Direct Response Email vs. Informational Email: Which is What You Need?

In This Article... If you're considering implementing an Email Marketing program, or if you've already started emailing but aren't sure if your content is the right type of content, this article explores whether an informational Newsletter or a direct response sales email will be better for your overall email needs.

Finding the Right Content Balance

Often, in developing your email program, the following question will arise: "Will my customers be offended and stop reading my emails if every email is just a hard sell?" Shortly after that question arises, the next logical question comes to mind. "But if I send only informational content in an email, will my users then follow through to purchase anything or will they just read the email and then delete it?"

Finding the balance between providing users with content that will make them feel that your Email Marketing is valuable and generating direct sales and ROI from your email campaign can be a challenge. Succeeding at accomplishing the best balance will most likely requires testing on your part. However, there are some basic concepts that you can walk through while developing your email program that will help.

What exactly did your users sign up for? What do your users want?

The first question that you need to ask yourself is this: "What exactly did you promise your users when they signed up for your Newsletter?" Does your Newsletter sign-up box promise users a weekly tip? Does it promise informational articles? Do users sign-up because you've assured them that there are exclusive monthly discounts to members of the email list? The most basic rule of

thumb is that your email recipients need to receive exactly what it is that you promised them. So if you've incentivized people into signing up for your email list by promising them quarterly white papers or ebooks, then that needs to be what you send if you want to keep your list loyal.

The second half to this question, however, is the more important one. What is it, exactly, that your users want to receive in their emails? And how do you determine this?

There are two ways to figure out what your users really want to receive. The first, creating multiple email list options, is detailed below. The second, however, is to do some simple a/b testing. In this instance, you'll need to change your email acquisition page (whether that's a separate landing page or a module on your main website) to present a different value proposition for your email product at different times. The easiest way to do this is to change it out at the beginning of a week. So, for example:

- During the first week, when people sign up for your email list, they see the message "Join our email list for weekly tips on becoming a happier person."
- During the second week, when people sign up for your email list, they see the message "Join our email list for exclusive monthly product discounts."

At the end of each week, divide the number of impressions that the pages with the email capture form received by the number of sign-ups to the email list in order to get your conversion percentage. The one that performed better is the one that your clients want to receive!

Create Multiple Email Formats to Get the Best of Everybody

An even better option than trying to limit your email list to just one format that appeals to only one segment of your audience is to create different email lists for your users to join. Typically, this would include an informational newsletter, a discount or special offer email and a generic update email list. However, depending on your product or business, there are many other options as well. You may have enough users to create email options that are specific to brands, geographies, and types of news or other segments.

The benefit of offering multiple email lists for your users to choose from is that you'll always be sure that your users are receiving exactly what they wanted. The downside, however, is that you'll be producing more email products and your list will be harder to manage, track and determine ROI on. The scope of your resources and the importance of email marketing in your marketing mix should be the driver on this decision making.

Also, remember that even if you offer multiple email lists to your clients, CAN-SPAM requires that you offer users the option of opting out of all emails instead of just one list!

What if my users want informational emails? Can my email program be profitable then?

One of the more common issues we've encountered in the email marketing world is the dilemma of what happens when you're users don't

actively want to be marketed to but instead want to receive informational emails. While discounts, sales and exclusive merchandise tend to be the primary reasons that people will join an email list, you will find the situation where people honestly prefer information based emails. In this case, we'd suggest that you keep in mind two factors when evaluating the value of your email program.

Retention Value: In an earlier article, we discussed customer life cycle and how email can be used to extend the time a customer is in a relationship with your brand. While a direct return on an email is important, there's also value in the fact that your email keeps your brand and product name in the mind of your users even when they're not ready to make a subsequent purchase from you. Because your email program develops a relationship with your clients, when they are ready to make a purchase again, you'll be the first option in their mind. Be sure to factor the retention value of your email when evaluating its role in your marketing mix.

Contextual Selling: Also, let it not be thought that it is impossible to generate sales out of an information email. It's just that doing that means that you need to take the time and effort to create very compelling content. Contextually mentioning products and linking to those products from your email, when done well, can actually yield better results than a direct sales piece in some instances. The key is to relate the product to the information in such a way that users really see how the product is useful to them and then act on that information. Contextual marketing is an entire lesson on its own. However, don't underestimate the value that can come from it!

Is it really terrible to send a direct response email to a list that's opted-in to a newsletter or informational email?

The short answer is that it's not terrible at all! Often your users will appreciate your periodic discount or sales email and respond favorably (and profitably) to it. The key is to limit how many times you send these types of emails and to make sure that the offers that you include in them will truly be perceived as valuable by your clients or users. If you're sending direct solicitation offers as frequently as informational newsletters, then that's too often! But sending a special offer monthly will most likely be appreciated by your users.

There's no hard and fast answer to what type of emails your clients want to receive. You'll need to experiment, listen to your customers and pay attention to what gets the best responses when you send it out. However, most companies will find that walking the line between useful content and compelling offers will yield the best results.

19. Smartphones and Email! How many people read emails on their phone, and why is that important to you?

In This Article... If you've got an active email list that you're sending to, be aware that many of them will be reading their email on smartphones. Comm100 explains in this article how to create an email that will be as effective on a mobile phone as on a large computer monitor.

The Smartphone Phenomenon

Walk into any coffee shop, library, bus stop, gym ... honestly walk just about anywhere and you'll see the masses browsing the web and checking their email on the newest generation of cell phones. Smartphones, as they're called, are defined as mobile phones that operate with advanced capabilities and operating systems, similar to that of PC functionality. These phones have internet browsers and capabilities, and, increasingly people are completing their internet surfing and email reading on these phones.

Why is this important to my email campaign?

The primary reason that the proliferation of smartphones is important to your email campaign is that your marketing email design needs to take into account how it will display on a smartphone. This makes email design even more restrictive than it used to be. We'll detail the elements of email design that you need to keep in mind at the end of this article, after we familiarize you with the lay of the land when it comes to smartphones.

Types of Smartphones

By the time that you read this article, the information about the most common types of smartphones will probably already be out of date! However, at this moment, the smartphone market

looks something like this (according to a 2009 study by Canalys):

- Symbian: 47%
- RIM (ie Blackberry): 21%
- Apple iPhone: 15%
- Microsoft Phone: 9%
- Android: 5%
- All Others: 3%

If you email a great deal, it would be worth your time to find somebody in the office with each of these phones to see how your email displays on their various screens and resolutions. It's becoming as important as checking your email in various email providers.

How many people use smartphones?

According to a recent comscore study, you can expect up to 20% of your email list to be reading their email on a smartphone, and, if the demographic that you market to involves business professionals, that number will skew even higher. It's a growing demographic, and one that you'll need to cater to if you want to optimize your Email Marketing platform.

How does this impact my Email Marketing?

The primary way that the emergence of smartphones will impact your Email Marketing

campaign will be to make your design team even more frustrated! We've already discussed how design teams can become frustrated with the html limitations and low graphics counts required in good email design. Imagine how your designers are going to respond to you when you tell that that, ideally, you need your email template to still resolve on a three inch by two inch screen. It should be readable on that size screen, and it can't be dependent on graphics in case they don't load!

The good news is that you'll have a better chance of having your email read by users checking their email on a smartphone! Some studies have indicated that users checking email on a smartphone do it more during leisure time or "down time" than those who check on a laptop. For example, they check while waiting for public transportation or for a meeting to start. So unlike trying to stand out in an inbox that people are trying to clear, you stand of chance of being opened just to that the user has something to read.

So, the keys to remember are that you should keep in mind that a portion of your users will view your email on a three inch by two inch screen. Then you can hope that you're on the lucky end of an increased open rate!

Should I segment out my smartphone users and send them a different email template?

There's been some discussion of the possibility of beginning to ask users when they join your email list if they regularly view their email on a smartphone. This would be similar to asking users if they prefer to receive their email in html or plain text, and the end result would be to send those users a different email template that was designed to resolve better on a small screen.

We'd recommend against this. Firstly, it's probably a segment of your list that doesn't justify the extra resources and list management to create an entirely different list for them. Secondly, even your most avid smartphone users won't always view email on their smartphone. So if you're sending an email that's designed for a small screen and then the user views it on a normal laptop or desktop, you've just sent a highly non-optimized email.

Rather than try to treat regular smartphone users separately, just practice good clean design and be sure your email doesn't explode into a mess when viewed on a smartphone screen!

Being aware that your users will view your email on a smartphone is becoming more and more important, and your email program will certainly suffer performance issues if you don't accommodate it. However, it's still a growing segment of your list, and your main focus should continue to be on laptop and desktop users.

20. Get Personal! When is the right time (and the wrong time) to personalize your email sends?

In This Article... If you're actively emailing but aren't sure if it will improve your campaign to include personalized user information such as a name or a user name, Comm100 explains in this article the pros and cons of both and the best times to use personalization in emails for the best results.

To Personalize or Not to Personalize

These days, almost all third party Email Marketing platforms offer the option to personalize your email sends by including your client's user name or name. Is this a good idea and can it improve your Email Marketing results? The answer, of course, is both yes and no.

The Basic Conversion Fact

Numerous studies have revealed that the more personalized you can make your email, the better it will convert. The simplest version of this would be to include your client's user name or name in the intro to the email. The most complex version of this would be to send multiple versions of your email with different offers and products displayed to users based on their on-site behaviors and purchasing patterns.

Let's assume that, for most of us, we will be operating on the "simple" end of this spectrum. Studies from multiple sources have revealed the following:

Using a name or user name in a subject line will improve open rates as users typically assume that this email has come from a trusted source.

Using a name or user name within the content of the email itself improves conversion rates and has the added benefit of creating brand loyalty with the user.

So, it would seem as though it would be an easy decision to include a personalized element in your email sends, right? Unfortunately it's not that simple.

The Issue of Privacy

Unfortunately, the issue of user's concerns about privacy and the use of their information can throw a wrench in your belief that personalization is the best move for your email product. Selecting a bad context to use a piece of personal information in can result in the abandonment of users from not only your email list but also your brand. Here are some important elements to keep in mind when deciding whether to incorporate any form of personalization in your email campaigns.

Would your users want other people to know that they use your product? There are any number of industries out there where clients and users might not be comfortable with others knowing that they use the product or service. This can range from anything as salacious as gambling or adult sites to something as essentially harmless as dating sites, medical information sites and financial advice sites. While, in theory, an email that uses personalization will only be seen by the person it was intended for, it can have the unfortunate side effect of creating uncertainty about the safety of their identity with a user. If you have reason to believe that any significant portion of your user base would be concerned with the

security of their identity, veer away from personalizing your email services.

Test...then test again! Are you tired of hearing this phrase yet? But it's true. If you're willing to take the hit that your test may result in some people leaving your list, run two separate a/b tests. The first test should use a name or user name within the email, and one that test should use that information in the subject line. If there's any question, you'll certainly know after that test if your users like personalization. Just remember, pay attention to all four key metrics when you do this: open rate, click-through rate, conversion AND unsub rate. It's one of the few tests where you may see a variation in unsubs that matters!

NEVER use a last name! The one thing that we can tell you for sure is that you should never use a client or user's last name as a personalization field. By just about every study ever done that is one step over the line of what people are comfortable seeing being used in a piece of marketing collateral. No last names! We would recommend not even using last initials!

Name or User Name?

One of the larger questions of using personalization in an email is whether to use a client's actual first name or their user name. Once again, there are arguments for each option.

First Name: Using a user's first name as your personalization element has the advantage of making the email, well, more personal! It takes the user out of being a nameless face or possibly randomized user name and into the area of having a relationship with you or your company. However, the downside is that it's less anonymous than using a user name, so clients who are uncomfortable about user privacy will have a more

negative reaction to it. The other downside is that a first name is actually a more readily available piece of information to a spammer. Spammers regularly buy lists of emails and registered users from list brokers and include the first name field, and a first name is actually a relatively easy piece of information to phish for spammers who scour the internet stealing user information from insecure forums and registration sites, so it can, in some cases, have the opposite impact of creating company trust. However, at base, it's true that nothing makes a person feel more like they're in a personal relationship than the use of their name!

User Name: Using a user name counteracts some of the issues that you'll encounter with using a client's first names. For starters, it's a more anonymous piece of information, so clients or users may not experience the same concerns about privacy. Secondly, a user name isn't a field commonly used or even obtainable by spammers, so you'll overcome what may be an initial reaction by users to seeing a potentially spam-like message. However, the downside is fairly obvious, which is that a user name is not as friendly or personal as a first name.

Whether you use first name or user name, be careful about where you put that information in the email! Because personalization is designed to improve your metrics, if you're not including it in the first two inches of the email, you've probably negated its positive impact already!

Personalization is an important tool in optimizing your email campaigns, but it needs to be approached with caution and a specific plan. Be sure to monitor your email performance closely once implementing it! And be prepared to test several different versions of it as well!

About Comm100: The #1 Fastest Growing Customer Service Software

Comm100 is the leader in customer service and customer communication software and the #1 fastest growing company among all the companies we can find in our industry.

Why are so many businesses choosing Comm100 for their online customer service and customer communications solutions? It's because Comm100 answers today's unique business challenges with three simple but effective concepts: powerful, integrated and hosted.

Powerful

No matter what your company's current technology base or communications system, Comm100 products can raise your processes and efficiencies to new levels. In today's fast-moving marketplaces, customers expect real-time communication and fast issue resolution. Comm100 products ensure that no customer communication or sales lead isn't optimized, timely and seamless.

Integrated

No part of the customer service, sales cycle or customer communications solution is left out. Integrate all parts of your process, from live chat to email follow-ups to sales cycle tracking. Comm100 products include [live chat](#), [ticket](#), [email marketing](#), [forum](#), [knowledge base](#) and [help desk](#). All the applications can run either independently or with other applications. You can choose among the applications according to your own business needs. Not only can you integrate your technology and software systems, you can integrate efforts across sales teams, customer service teams and marketing teams with ease.

Hosted

Delivered as SaaS applications, Comm100 products are fully hosted and completely managed by Comm100. We take care of all the hardware, software, backup and maintenance work on the server side to simplify your IT infrastructure, so that you can have more time to spend on running your business.

We fully understand reliability and security of our solutions are very important to the success of your business. We are committed to providing Better Products and Better Services. That's why:

- All our solutions are well designed and tested;
- We choose world-class data center to host our server farm;
- We use high-end HP servers to run our solutions;
- We use RAID ADG to protect your data from hard disk failure;
- We execute rigorous backup and disaster recovery plan.

What can Comm100 do for you? Learn more about our various services on our website or [contact us](#) today to learn more about how Comm100 products can be your customer service, sales cycle and customer communications solution.

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