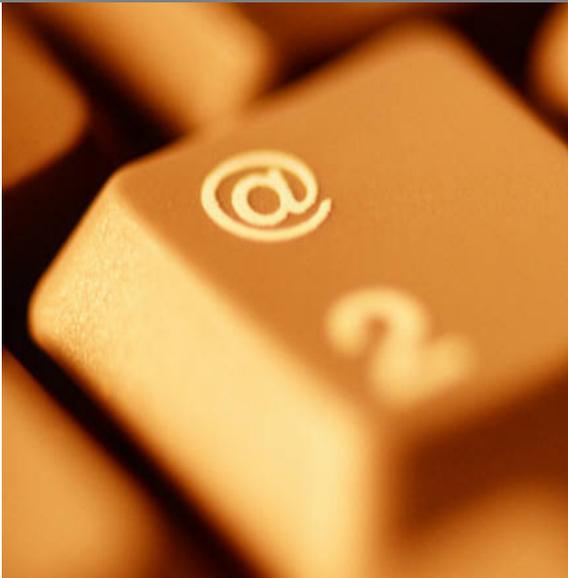


The 10 Perennial Principles in Email Marketing





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Introduction

Email marketing is now accepted as one of the top tools used to execute a marketing strategy. Email is more than a mere message delivered electronically. Email has the capacity to reach a growing audience that is irrespective of current and future technological mediums.

By understanding the 10 perennial principles in email marketing, you have the opportunity to take advantage of this marketing method successfully.

Email Works on a Permission Basis

Anyone can send a personal email to anyone else. Email *marketing* is a totally different game. Email marketing relies on the recipient to provide consent to be sent email. This means providing an email address and permission. Getting permission means more than getting a person to opt-in to receive your email. It further includes protecting the data the person chooses to provide. If a subscriber suspects that their expectation of privacy has been compromised, he or she is likely to retract consent.

The implications of a shortened subscriber list as well as sending unwanted email will become apparent in the following email marketing principles.

Email ROI can be Huge

In the early days of email marketing, the idea of a “free” communication channel was the norm. However, as businesses and marketing managers figured out what worked best, the paradigm shifted from “free” to “cost effective.” Email design, content, and deliverability require some funding from the marketing budget. If any of these areas are ignored or executed poorly, your investment in email marketing could all be a waste. As you will read later on, subscriber attrition is more costly than the investment to carry out email marketing properly.

However, email marketing remains relatively inexpensive, even when managed by an outside firm. Therefore, return on email marketing dollars spent can be enormous. How enormous? A leading research firm concluded that for every marketing \$1.00 spent on email marketing the return is a whopping \$57.25!

Everyone Views Email Differently

Nearly all email marketing software programs come with a “preview” button, intending to give you a glimpse of what your email will look like in your subscribers’ inboxes. But your subscribers are all different and use different means to access email. How complex is this differentiation?

Take, for example, just these three possible email access options:

Subscriber I: Email delivered on an enterprise-level server, viewed through Outlook preview pane, on a PC running Windows Vista.

The 10 Email Marketing Principles

- Email Works on a Permission Basis
- Email ROI can be Huge
- Everyone Views Email Differently
- SPAM Laws Matter
- Email Length Makes a Difference
- Email Lives Forever
- Measure, Measure, Measure
- Success is an Out of “Body” Experience
- Subscriber Lists are Email Oxygen
- Content is King, Frequency is Queen



Email and the Smart Phone

According to a Nielsen study, smart phone users spend nearly 50% of their mobile Internet time using email applications. So while you may be budgeting for social media marketing, remember that your subscribers are still reading your emails while on the go.

Email Automation Breakdown

Email automation is a blessing for any time-conscious marketer. But don't forget the rules: the content must be valuable. Carefully design the email campaign first, and then set it up for automation.

The Disparaged RSS

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) was the hottest thing going 10 years ago. Now, it's all but an extinct channel for marketers to consider. This is a gap to fill with your email marketing efforts.



Subscriber 2: Email delivered through Gmail Web program, viewed through an Android operating system application, on a HTC mobile phone.

Subscriber3: Email delivered on a shared server, viewed through AOL Desktop 1.7 Web portal, on a Mac laptop.

There are many, many more possible access options. The bottom line is that Subscribers 1, 2, and 3 will have a different looking email from each other. A certain number of your subscribers will see the "text only" version of your email, meaning code and images will be absent. 33% of your subscribers will have the viewing of images disabled by default. Lastly, html and other design elements render differently in each unique access option.

That "preview" button doesn't quite cut it. Instead, set up "dummy accounts" in different access options and test-send your email. You'll likely be unable to design the "perfect" email that displays uniformly in all accounts, but it is possible to create an email for the majority.

SPAM Laws Matter

You don't have to be a lawyer to understand right from wrong. So, when it comes to sending SPAM emails, the sender is always on the defensive side of right or wrong. SPAM is defined, in a rather open-ended manner, as *any* unwanted commercial email. Therefore, a fine line exists for the email marketer trying to deliver email to the largest number of recipients while not violating any laws.

The U.S. Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, otherwise known as CAN-SPAM, has significant and far-reaching power. One judgment under the CAN-SPAM act reached \$873 million. That's a lot of money for sending an email.

Beyond basic privacy issues, it is important to understand how SPAM complaints prevent future emails from being delivered, even to those who have opted-in. Many reports and case studies are available that detail how Internet Service Providers (ISPs) throttle email delivery based upon various "SPAM markers" and "triggers." Additionally, most email servers and Web-based systems deploy internal SPAM blocking protocols.

By familiarizing yourself with the laws and best practices around SPAM, you'll have a better opportunity to reach your audience for a long time to come.

Email Length Makes a Difference

The question goes, "How long should I write my email?" The answer is, "Right up to where your subscribers stop reading." Clearly, the answer is insufficient, but that doesn't mean it's inaccurate. Testing shows that your most valuable subscribers *will* read lengthy emails. How lengthy depends on the nature of your business and how well you segment your audience to receive relevant email content.

An important practice in email marketing is to place the call to action toward the top of the email body, and then repeat the call to action throughout the email. If

your subscribers are familiar with your brand, keep “stock” information at the bottom of your email and new information at the top. Be cautious with images and graphics in your email design. These, obviously, extend the length of the email.

The increasing number of users accessing email on mobile devices further complicates any attempts at defining an “ideal” email length. However, this trend does reinforce the fact that knowing your audience will help you style your email.

Email Lives Forever

Where do emails go to die? They don't. Smart email marketers keep an archive of sent emails for subscribers to access. While “one-time only” type offers may not have much lasting purpose, “branding” emails and user-valued content emails can perpetually drive marketing efforts.

And there's something else to consider about the life of an email. The sender can't control when it gets deleted. A subscriber can conceivably keep an email for a lifetime. If an email provides worth-while content, it may remain in the inbox forever. Also, emails are easily shared (forwarded). This not only counts toward an email's reach, but its lifespan as well.

Measure, Measure, Measure

In carpentry, the adage goes, “Measure twice; cut once.” In email marketing, it is better stated, “Measure constantly.” Email measurement relates to two areas: testing and analytic feedback. Testing is best described as trying different emails to determine which works best. Analytic feedback is the data gathered after each email is sent.

The first step in testing email is sending an internal version. This affords you an opportunity to catch mistakes in functionality (such as broken links) and content (such as typos or misstated information.) The second step in testing is often referred to as A/B testing or A/B/C testing. This implies sending different emails to sections of different subscribers to see which is more effective.

Analytic feedback refers to the “stats” of an email, including how many times the email was opened, which links were clicked and how often, what time of day was the email accessed, etc. These metrics are often expressed as ratios against each other. Understanding what they mean helps you construct better emails in the future.

Success is an Out of “Body” Experience

When designing an email, most marketers spend all of their time on the body of the email – the offer, call to action, and layout. As the launch deadline approaches, only then do they consider “out of body” components like subject lines, sent from addresses, and preview/pre-header text. But these things are critical in the success of email marketing.

Subject Lines

Subject lines are the invitation for the reader to open an email. Subject lines need to



Before starting your first email marketing campaign:

1. Do you have the technical skills to execute an effective strategy?
2. Do you have time to provide consistent focus on email marketing?
3. Do you have the personnel to respond to and engage with your readers?
4. Do you have an authoritative understanding of legal requirements and compliancy standards?
5. Do you have a robust software application to draft, edit, test, deliver, and manage email?
6. Do you have a resource for supplying content? (Are you checking for plagiarism?)
7. Do you have a schedule for delivery?
8. Do you have a list capture procedure that is integrated across multiple channels?
9. Do you have an opt-out feature and a communicated policy?
10. Do you have the time, money, or willingness to become proficient in your weak areas?



The keys to an effective email marketing strategy:

1. Comply with all laws and regulations, as well as deliverability best practices
2. Promote dialogue between the sender and reader
3. Offer helpful and valuable content
4. Strategically integrate with other marketing channels
5. Address an individual on a personal level
6. Remain consistent
7. Set goals and adjust when needed
8. Utilize analytics to improve customer relationships
9. Budget both time and capital to make sure it's done right



capture interest and inspire action. The tricky part? Subject lines can only be so long. Often a user's inbox list display cuts off a subject line after 50-75 characters. So being creative in a short space is necessary to fulfill the "interest and inspire" requirements. But there is a counterintuitive practice for writing successful subject lines: make them long. Knowing that the end of your subject line will be cut off enables you to build a question into your readers' minds: "what's around the corner?" Take the following two examples into consideration:

Subject line 1: 50% off sale ends this Saturday

Subject line 2: Save 50% now through Saturday on all your favorite [cut]

"Favorite what?" begs the reader, inspiring him or her to open the email to find out.

Sent From Addresses

A user's inbox list display not only shows the subject line, but who sent the email. Just like the subject line, the sent from address can be customized. So, why not customize it to increase interest and inspire action? The best practice for customizing a sent from address is to consistently (in other words, every time) use your brand name. A brand name is recognizable and trustworthy. Unless your name is your brand, you'll likely be relegated to the junk mail folder if you just use your name.

Preview/pre-header Text

Preview/pre-header text is the first piece of text above the body of your e-mail and is displayed after the subject line. Preview/pre-header text is viewed mostly in list displays prior to the email being opened. Poorly designed emails will ignore this factor, choosing instead to place "function" items in this area, such as "forward to a friend" or "click here to view this email as a webpage." Neither of these items engages readers and makes it less likely that an email will be opened. With more and more email users reading emails on mobile devices (read: smaller screens) it is vital that your email contain creative and engaging preview/pre-header text.

Subscriber Lists are Email Oxygen

The biggest mistake email marketers make in managing their subscriber lists is completely overlooking the managing part. In order for an email to breathe, it must have subscribers. Using your email measuring tools you'll be able to practice sound list hygiene, which means pruning unresponsive subscribers, segmenting subscribers based upon interest and other factors, and emphasizing list growth.

This last point, list growth, is an ongoing process. In addition to a sign-up form on your website, consider these other opportunities being used by large and small companies alike:

- Use your call center or answering service as an email acquisition opportunity
- Merchant copy receipts, table/display tents, and "fishbowls" can be used to capture email addresses while a customer is in your place of business

- Ask during a sales presentation – if you're meeting face-to-face with a potential customer/client, simply ask to include him or her on your email subscription list

Content is King, Frequency is Queen

There's no question that your email content has to be exemplary. This means it has to qualify (in the readers' minds) as relevant, timely, valuable, and engaging. Email relevancy means the reader instantly thinks, "I know what this email is about, and it is important to me." Email timeliness refers to the email being delivered when the reader is likely checking his or her inbox, as well as the call to action taking place when the reader is prepared to act. Email value is measured by how much the reader learns as a result of the email. ("Sale ends tomorrow" is valuable knowledge; "Just checking in to say hi" is not valuable.) Emails that are positively engaging elicit a response from readers, whether that is following the call to action, clicking links, forwarding the email, or replying. Unsubscribing, of course, does not count as positively engaging.

So let's say you've mastered the four pillars of content. How often do you share your creative work? The successful email marketer should follow the five day rule. Allow five days between emails with the same content or offer. Many large companies have seen their subscriber lists vaporized when experimenting with "count-down" emails – 5 days to go, 4 days to go, 3 days to go, etc. The daily inbox bombardment activates SPAM triggers and encourages readers to unsubscribe. On the other hand, don't let weeks go by without your subscribers hearing from you. New subscribers should instantly be greeted with an email. Providing interesting, well spaced emails is pivotal to your overall email success.

Conclusion

While there will always be shifts in email marketing trends and expectations, these 10 perennial principles will remain. Understanding them is vital to success. However, executing an actionable strategy to incorporate the significance of these principles is equally as important.

At the risk of "doing it wrong" many small and medium-sized organizations are turning to marketing firms to handle email marketing on their behalf. The results speak for themselves.

About Hamptons Creative Group

With more than 25 years of expertise in marketing and promotion, founder and CEO Linda Miller, who has worked in Manhattan and lived in the Hamptons for(ever), understands firsthand how to create visibility and develop successful marketing programs.

The result: Hamptons Creative Group, a boutique marketing agency helping businesses attract their ideal clients.

The Hamptons Creative Group experts have 15 years combined experience in email marketing, ranging from one-person businesses to *Fortune* 500 corporations. Clients rely on HCG to create content, graphics, and templates for their email marketing efforts. Additionally, HCG manages the send, analytics, and subscriber lists for clients to ensure it's done right.

The diversity of the client base—high profile individuals, retailers, service businesses, community leaders, charities, and non-profits—is reflective of the effectiveness of HCG's creative solutions. Well-designed and executed, effective, and catalyzing, Hamptons Creative Group's services support a business' growth, speak to audiences on a visceral, value-based level, and increase the profitability, reach, and profile of the business.

At Hamptons Creative Group, we create success stories.

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