

Maximize Your Email Campaign Results with Improved Relevance

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Let's assume for a moment that you are utilizing best-practices in nearly all aspects of your email marketing efforts.

Why then, you ask yourself, do some subscribers who had opted-in report you as spam?

Why aren't your open, read and click-through rates where you expected them to be?

And most important of all: why aren't they converting?

This white paper explores some of the ways email marketers can improve these critical measures by increasing the relevance of their emails. This can be accomplished by several tactics that I will discuss here.

Database Cleanup

One of the most essential measurables to watch is the NON-open rate. These are the folks who signed up long ago but take no action from your repeated contacts. They don't take the time to unsubscribe – they simply ignore you.

I'm often surprised when I audit a marketer's list and see how long it's been since that recipient took any kind of action. The usual response is that "they opted-in to receive our emails, and haven't asked to be removed. As long as the address remains valid, we want to keep marketing to them. You never know when they might buy, and we don't want to lose them.

Besides, our company's management will question us as to why our list is shrinking when it's supposed to be growing!"

Removing non-openers has two key benefits:

When an email marketer has fewer non-openers, the ISP's will often see this as improved engagement. This can translate into better inbox delivery rates, which will improve your results overall. In addition, this smaller list is now made up of more active recipients, and your open and click-through rates will instantly increase.

Make a determination as to when you remove a non-opener. This will vary by target audience, frequency of emails, the original subscribe date, length of your sales cycle, and more. But generally I recommend removing a subscriber if they haven't taken any action on an email in six deliveries or less.

For those marketers who just can't bring themselves to toss out an address that was a valid opt-in, you can always put these members into a special list and from time-to-time send them a special message inviting them back by highlighting the value of your offers. Anyone who opens these special mailings can be moved back to the master list. Purging your list of non-openers is suggested by most of the ISP's as a way to build engagement, which is a key to better inbox delivery.



Another issue I've seen with regards to database hygiene is to ensure all records are truly opt-in! Oftentimes a master database was originally created by pulling together records from multiple sources – some of which may be prospects that the sales team would like to reach. Take time to review the list and if you can't clearly demonstrate that they were a true opt-in, you should remove them – especially if they haven't opened recently.

People Buy From People

Some business models do best when they speak as the business – not an individual. Take Amazon for example. But unless you are operating at that level, your emails should be a personal message from a real person.

Don't simply send from an "info@" address, or label the sender "Your Friends at ...". This is especially important in B2B settings where a sales team member "owns" a lead or client.

Best-practice email marketing today is not batch 'n blast – it is one person engaging in a conversation with one person.

Track Recipients' Behaviors

Carefully watch what links your subscribers are clicking on. Make sure you have a process in place to capture click information on each campaign. This data gives you an opportunity to

understand what is important to them and to alter your message to them going forward.

Here's a real-world example from one of my clients:

Diesel eBooks is a leading independent eBook retailer, featuring more than 2.4 million titles in 40 categories and 2,700 subcategories. This segmentation by genre is a powerful tool for delivering highly-relevant messaging based on the recipients' buying history AND click behavior.

First, I took a look at their customer database and created separate messaging based on each customer's most recent buying habits. A Romance novel aficionado received an email featuring 6 of the newest titles, and a list of the top ten best sellers.

I further segmented the list between high-value buyers (more than \$100 in the past year) and the rest of the list. I even segmented by time zone (they have customers across the globe) so that the message is received at the most advantageous time of day.

But in order to get a better understanding of each individual's preferences, I included a series of colored buttons that led to several other similar categories – for example, Romance readers had links to General Fiction, Science Fiction, Fantasy and Suspense/Thrillers.



The result: click-through rates as high as 8.2% (average 3.2%) for the primary campaign, while the rates for the follow-up emails to those who clicked on a different genre were as high as 32%.

The beauty of automating this process is that it doesn't require a separate campaign to ask subscribers to update their preference or tell us what other genres they might read. The information is added to each recipient's profile instantly and automatically.

Dynamic Profiling

Also known as dynamic content, this process automates the development of highly-specific content within each email message based solely on the details within each subscriber's profile information. The email marketing program will automatically "serve up" the images, content, offers and links that are specifically relevant to that individual. Depending on which program you use these variables could be nearly infinite, resulting in a message that is at the height of relevancy to the subscriber.

For example, I developed an email marketing campaign for a commercial printing company. Their list of current and former clients, plus opt-in subscribers to their e-newsletter, numbered well into the thousands. I helped them segment the list into more than a dozen different categories: construction, law firms, retail, non-profits, hospitality, K12 education, higher education, and so on. Rather developing many

templates for all segments, I created a single template that featured an opening paragraph of copy, specific locations for images, coupons and the sales rep's contact info.

I then wrote segment-specific copy for that opening paragraph and obtained stock images that depicted relevant scenes within each segment. This enabled me to hit "send" only once, and the resulting emails were highly relevant to each industry segment – in terms of the opening copy, images, and offer. Even the "From" address and name were relevant to the recipient, since it appeared to be sent from that company's sales representative who may have been serving that client for many years. This goes back to the point I made earlier: people buy from people, not from companies. Even the sales rep's photo, email and cell number were automatically put into the copy and closing lines.

The result was an average open rate of 33.7% -- although some segments exceeded 50%. Each sales rep received an automated notification when one of their clients clicked through to a specific topic, letting them know what was important to them at the time: "green" printing, variable printing technology, reduced pricing on digital printing, and so on. The sales rep was able to follow-up with a phone, since that notification email contained full contact information, and they were ready to discuss the topic of interest.

This technology even allows you to deliver a message on the day and time that each person



prefers. If a recipient opens most emails on a Wednesday at 5 p.m., the system can allow you to deliver the message at that time.

Data Analysis

Just because this dynamic profiling technology allows you to semi-automate the development of relevant emails, it doesn't remove the need for your hands-on review of the data. It is important to continually test your campaigns and introduce new A/B splits based on what you're seeing.

Be certain you maintain control over your subscription and database management processes, creative development and deliverability data. Don't make snap decisions – data must be verified over multiple sends.

The end result of these efforts will be improved deliverability and ISP reputation, higher open and click-through rates and increased conversions to sales.

About Vogel Marketing Solutions

I specialize in best-practice email marketing. I consult with businesses on email database development, subject lines, creative development, campaign analysis, A/B split testing and deliverability. I will help marketers adhere to CAN-SPAM guidelines, and ensure their messages make to the in-box.



My 30 years of extensive marketing experience means that I approach email marketing as part of a companies' total marketing efforts -- both online and offline.

My email marketing clients include Fortune 500 companies, national retailers, e-commerce websites, manufacturers, not-for-profits, real estate firms, energy companies, construction firms and more.

I can support other marketing companies by providing email services for their clients -- working invisibly in the background, or directly with the clients if needed. This allows ad agencies to offer best-practice, state-of-the-art email marketing services without the need for staffing, licenses, training and other implementation expenses.

