

Focus on improving relevancy, timing, and impact of Your Email marketing

By Stephanie Miller , November 25, 2009

How about that -- strategic e-mail marketing works. The opposite -- sending e-mail marketing with abandon -- is always a bad idea. High frequency coupled with low relevance is a death knell -- it depresses response, annoys subscribers, increases unsubscribes, and spikes complaints (counted with every click on the Report Spam button in Outlook, Cloudmark, or Internet service providers (ISPs) like Yahoo and Gmail, which power many small business e-mail). Too many complaints will prevent all your messages from reaching the inbox and earning a response.

To take advantage of the importance of the inbox in this busy season, focus on improving relevancy, timing, and impact.

Alert subscribers to what will come next. If you plan to send more messages in the next month, let your subscribers know -- and give them an option to lower frequency instead of ignoring, unsubscribing, or complaining.

Get white listed. When the inbox is overcrowded, it's even more important to be presenting images and links on in the inbox. Ask them to white list you (aka, add to the address book) in sidebars, preheader text, and the footer. Be sure you're signed up for all the available ISP white lists and third party certification programs where you qualify, which speed you past the spam filters and in some cases get images and links turned on by default.

Give them more. Got a cool end-of-year message? Package it into an e-mail series (think a white paper worth of content in five to eight e-mail messages) and offer it as a separate and value-added option. When subscribers opt in for a specific, short-term series of information, they're more likely to be in market and highly qualified -- and more attentive. The list will be smaller, but more responsive. Be sure to promote the short-term offerings to those who connect with you in other channels, like LinkedIn or online forums.

Focus on subject lines. To break through, make it all about the subscriber. With so many discounts, Webinars, and special deals in the air, be sure to differentiate and add value. "Toolkit for writing that business case due Friday" may win over "Download our white paper on business planning." Always be authentic in subject lines -- pure hype won't generate clicks and conversions, and may backfire on brand loyalty and trust.

Stay clear of the barrage. Retailers will be flooding the inbox, and you may be surprised at how many people sign up for retail e-mail messages with their corporate address. Consider shifting away from prime retail days like Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday -- or sending earlier or later in the day.

Watch the tone. Stay on message. Avoid glib or clever holiday copy unless it's specifically relevant to your product or service.

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AUBURN PRINTERS 13020 Earhart Ave • Auburn • CA 95602
integrated marketing 888-282-8764 • fax 530-885-6517
www.AuburnPrinters.com • print@AuburnPrinters.com