



10 Tips to Ensure Email Marketing Success

“If you don’t help your customers reach greater heights, who will? Your competitors?”

Don Schultz



White Paper

10 Tips to Ensure Email Marketing Success

Executive Summary

This white paper explains email marketing best practice, acknowledging that communication with customers and prospects via email is highly effective in terms of response rates, cost effectiveness, speed and ease of use for a business.



Contact with our customers and prospects via email is acknowledged as being the most effective in terms of response rates, and the most cost effective, fast and easy to use for a business.

But successful email marketing campaigns don't just happen when we push the "submit" button – a lot of thought and planning has to go into the message beforehand, to ensure it delivers the return and results we need.

A successful email marketing campaign will convert contacts into pipeline prospects and eventually into customers. Since 1992 Business Advantage has been working with Vendors within the IT, Telecommunications and Digital Broadcasting sectors, helping them and their channel partners generate leads for ongoing pipelines. In more recent times, as a fore runner to some of the hundreds of telemarketing campaigns we have carried out, initial contact and qualification is often made by email. We went through the process - and the pain - of refining this aspect of e-marketing; we thought you might benefit from the experience we have gained and we share the following with you in the hope that they will help avoid pitfalls you may be about to experience.

We hope you enjoy our 10 Tips.

Key Tip:

"Contact with our customers and prospects, via email, is acknowledged as being the most effective in terms of response rates and the most cost effective, fast and easy to use for a business."

- 1. Ignore the Planning at your peril**
- 2. Invest in your design**
- 3. HTML and Plain Text, Automation?**
- 4. Subject Lines and avoiding the Spam Filters**
- 5. Make it personal**
- 6. Don't forget the preview Pane!**
- 7. Keep your Act Clean!**
- 8. Testing**
- 9. Deliverability and Staying off the Grey List**
- 10. Tell them who you are.**



“Think about whom on your database is qualified to receive the message – it is useless and potentially damaging to your company’s credibility and future campaigns if you...”



1. IGNORE THE PLANNING AT YOUR PERIL

Like any other form of marketing campaign, email marketing should have a plan with specific aims clearly illustrated. It's all too easy to design an impressive looking email cover and take advantage of available technology to add links etc. only to blast this out to the entire database without thinking about how relevant the message is to the recipients, how this is to be followed up and what the expected return on investment is.

So – be clear about the reason for the campaign. Are you creating a ‘batch and blast’ communication or trying to start a dialogue? Do you have a new or specific product or service you wish to draw to the attention of the intended recipients? What do you anticipate the response to be, or what would you like it to be? Can you cope if the response exceeds your expectations? Think about whom on your database is qualified to receive the message – it is useless and potentially damaging to your company’s credibility and future campaigns if you are sending a broadcast to launch the latest large format printer to a services organisation, or to invite the Finance Director of a construction company to a seminar on the benefits of your supply chain management solution.

Plan ahead for the day/week/month you wish your campaigns to be broadcast. Coordinate your efforts with those of other areas of the business – whilst consistent and regular messages to the database are important, overkill can be damaging. Optimum time for sending B2B email broadcasts is said to be (depending on whose statistics you use) Tuesday – Thursday mornings or early afternoon. B2C are said to trigger better response rates when sent during the evening or at weekends.

Estimate the ROI - this will still be crucial to include in your overall marketing budget, and management will expect to see a figure that also includes the cost of analyzing the response and planning for improvement for the next campaign.

2. INVEST IN YOUR DESIGN

Today a high and growing percentage of emails are read on mobile devices (phones or tablets – iPhones alone do over 25% of email opens) so ensure your design is suitable, for example, limit the subject line to 50 characters and remember that mobile users tap and swipe to see more, they don’t ‘click’ and buttons need to be easy to tap (at least 44 pixels square). Ensure your messages display well on desktop devices perhaps in multiple columns but recompose dynamically perhaps in a single column for smaller screens. For content make use of the effort that has gone into your website, or whitepapers, and link to these from the email using an eye catching and relevant message. Use HTML fonts and colours effectively.



“Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.”

Benjamin Franklin

Be clear with your message – ambiguous or contrived content is a turn-off and terms that may be misunderstood will lead to the recipient hitting the delete button.

Use short sentences and paragraphs – you have a very small window between the email being opened and the next action – so make it easy to read and absorb, to maximise the chances of the reader looking further. Leave the recipient in no doubt what to do next by a clear call-to-action – make hyperlinks obvious but avoid saying “click here” (see Tip 4, Subject Lines and Avoiding the Spam Filters).

Consider including social proof points such as testimonials (especially as video), case studies or survey results. Always include a PS possibly with a secondary call-to-action.

3. HTML, PLAIN TEXT AND AUTOMATION?

Including a plain text version of your email in addition to HTML may still be important in case you have any contacts who cannot view HTML – ensure they will still receive your message, rather than a blank email! Plain text should also be delivered in place of HTML messages that are blocked by SPAM filters.

Many tools are now available to automate email campaigns based on event and behavioural triggers, reporting on them, managing lists, etc – consider using one of these tools as a productivity aid so you can spend more time on strategy and design.

4. SUBJECT LINES AND AVOIDING THE SPAM FILTERS

What is SPAM? The answer is different things to different people – what I find a useful and informative email you may find irritating and “junk”. Generally, email communications from an unknown sender are classed as spam.

Key to email marketing is avoiding the spam filters. Some organisations consider spam email to be such a problem (and at an estimated global spam ratio of over 70% - 1 in every 1.4 emails this may not be surprising!) that filters are turned up so high that legitimate messages are also caught. This is termed “false positive” and certainly doesn’t make the email marketer’s job any easier.

Think about your subject line – including its length (for mobile devices) - it is one of the most important components of a successful email campaign, just as the headline is vitally important to a newspaper article. Not only is it the first part of your message your contacts will read, so you must remember to keep it concise, relevant and where possible personal, but you can also fall at the first hurdle here by formatting it incorrectly. The use of ALL CAPS or excessive punctuation such as multiple exclamation marks in the subject line immediately triggers the

“People buy what they need from those who understand what they want.”

Bill Brooks and Tom Travesano



“I can confidently recommend the services offered by Business Advantage. I have found the quality of their data to be high in comparison to other sources in the industry. I also find Business Advantage to be a highly professional organisation that demonstrates a high degree of business integrity.”

European Marketing Programs Manager, HP

spam filter, as will currency amounts and phrases such as “double your”, “for only”, “opportunity”, “offer”, “click here” and “free”.

There are many other terms and formats this will happen with, and it is worthwhile investing some time researching spam filter scoring systems on an ongoing basis.

By being specific in your subject line, the spam filters should recognise that the message is not generic and let it through to the intended mailbox.

5. MAKE IT PERSONAL

Before your email is even opened the recipient usually sees the ‘to’, ‘from’ and ‘subject’ fields – these then are the basis of the decision whether to open the email. Personalisation in both the “to” and “from” fields can make the difference between your contacts opening and reading the email or consigning it to the deleted items folder, for example, making the ‘from’ a recognised brand and preferably a recognised or important person. Remember you are not the only company that is hitting their mailbox with ever increasing frequency, and if they see a company or account manager name that they recognise they are more likely to do the former.

Addressing the email with the contact’s first name, assuming they are comfortable with this approach, and use of terms like “you” and “yours” all create empathy.

Further personalisation will greatly improve open, click through, download and ultimately conversion rates. As we said, gone are the days of mass broadcasting to the database – email marketing is the most widely adopted method of getting the message across and therefore the most competitive. Think relevant and begin to create modified content to fit the sector and sub sectors you are sending to rather than being general, and make your contacts feel that you are addressing them personally (or at least as a focused segment) and not just sending the same message to your entire database.

Don’t be tempted to just write about how great you and your offering is and how much you have achieved. Make it personally relevant and applicable! Make your contacts feel that you understand their business, you feel their pain and you are addressing benefits that will ameliorate that pain – focus on benefits first, features second.

You will find that the more information you collect and record on your clients and prospects the more targeted you can become in your approach. The more targeted you are, the more “click-throughs” your campaign will achieve, fewer “unsubscribes” will be recorded and your ROI will increase.



"We needed data to support our direct marketing campaigns but did not have the resources in house to generate it, so using Business Advantage was ideal."

Marketing Manager, 3D Systems



"I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been."

Wayne Gretzky

Always include social share buttons in your emails to encourage readers to continue the conversation with their contacts.

6. DON'T FORGET THE PREVIEW PANE!

It is estimated that 80% of emails are viewed and often actioned in the preview pane! This means you need to look seriously at the size of the message, and your banner headers – using these may mean that your recipients see a large white box with a red cross in the preview pane and nothing else. The result? Delete!

Have a review of all your email templates – design your text and optimal colours to fit in the top 3-4 inches to maximise the chances of your contact seeing the message. Being concise and direct is all the more important now – web based email packages such as Microsoft Outlook Web Access and Hotmail also have preview panes added so if your targets are business or consumer focused, or remote workers, it is highly likely they will be reading your message through a preview pane.

7. KEEP YOUR ACT CLEAN

So we all agree that getting the RIGHT message, at the RIGHT time, at the RIGHT intervals to the RIGHT PEOPLE maximises your chance of a campaign having the result on your sales' pipeline that you're looking for. Sounds easy, but keeping data on your lists up to date is key to email marketing.

Inaccurate data not only acts as a constraint upon marketing effectiveness, it can damage your business reputation. Best practice has to be applied to avoid this – adopt an internal policy of updating the data held on a rolling cycle, try to keep all your information no older than 6 months. If this is not possible, resource wise, in house, talk to a specialist data cleaning company about what they can offer.

Try to grow and enhance your data at every opportunity. Develop multiple contacts with different responsibilities within organisations, record the information in a CRM system and use this to effectively target your campaigns. Provide opt-in options and a subscription form for regular newsletters.

Think about purchasing additional lists from a data broker – this can be a minefield and make sure you are completely happy that the provider will:

- De-dupe any list against your data
- Provide information on how the list was built – avoid any that have been compiled from sources such as magazine subscriptions or exhibition attendees, they are likely to be irrelevant and a waste of money
- Guarantee the list has a decision maker focus



“I was very pleased that Business Advantage exceeded our expectations in the number of new contacts they collected and in obtaining email addresses, both of which were really important for us.”

Marketing Manager, BT



“In any moment of decision the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.”

Theodore Roosevelt

- Give you the option to select by multiple criteria (geographic area, number of employees, users of a specific software package or technology etc)
- Give you various pricing options, to suit your budget and requirements, or offer a “try before you buy” facility
- Ensure the data is “opt-in” and not “scraped” from the Internet.

8. TESTING

It is imperative that you test your email before broadcasting to the database or you could be throwing hours’ worth of work into the bin. Content must be checked by independent colleagues – it is very easy to miss grammatical errors when you have been looking at the text for a while. Also, what appears to be a perfectly clear message to you could be confusing to your colleague – this is important feedback as your recipients could be of the same mind. This is particularly common when promoting a product or service – what is a description to you could be jargon to someone else.

Layout is also important (don’t forget the preview pane, see Tip 6), and it is advisable to test this on different email clients as display may vary. Have all links checked to ensure they work, including the subscribe/unsubscribe messages.

In an ever changing world make sure you keep your content fresh by constantly reviewing, improving and testing your design, message, subject line, images, links, videos, delivery days to understand what your prospects and customers best respond to. For example test possible subject lines with A/B testing to see which obtains the best open rate and response rates on test samples before emailing your whole list. Measure the number sent against the bounce rate and address any irregularities immediately. Try to go beyond standard email metrics – with the right tools you can see where prospects went on your website, their number, frequency and duration of visits, their social sharing – all these behaviours can help you segment better.

9. DELIVERABILITY AND STAYING OFF THE GREY LIST

Spam filters are the main issue with deliverability of email messages, but there are other important steps you can take to ensure as many of your messages reach their intended destination as possible.

Look at potential technical pitfalls. Ensure your organisation has reverse DNS entry setup, or SPF code published in your DNS record to establish your authenticity as an email sender. If email can be seen to be coming from a known source, or even from a

“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

Thomas Edison



“A good reputation is more valuable than money.”

Publilius Syrus

credible source, deliverability rates will be higher. You can try asking the recipient to add you to their address book – either by courtesy call first or if this is not possible by adding a message to the email, to minimise the chance of the message being blocked for this reason.

Adhere to unsubscribe requests – repeatedly sending email through to contacts who have unsubscribed to certain or all messages is guaranteed to ruin your relationship with them.

Adopt a bounce management policy. A bounce is a notification that your message, for whatever reason, didn’t make it to the recipient. ISPs can communicate the reason for the bounce using SMTP codes, but basically they can be categorised as “hard” or “soft”. A hard bounce may occur because:

- The domain doesn’t exist
- The recipient doesn’t exist
- The message was rejected.

After investigation many of these should be removed from your list – if you continue to send to these addresses you run the risk of being grey or even black listed, and it is strongly advised not to retry hard bounces more than three times.

Careful monitoring after each campaign may indicate that certain domains are rejecting your messages, and content and format may need to be reviewed accordingly.

A soft bounce may occur if:

- The recipient’s mailbox is full
- The email server is not responding.

Check “invalid email” reports – these are often reported separately to bounced messages and are frequently something as simple as the email address being spelled incorrectly (e.g. john.smith@abc.co.u) or a punctuation mark at the end of the address.

To ensure your campaigns remain relevant and focused, it is good practice to include a referral or “send-to-a-friend” link on the email message, and also a change email/update profile link, ensuring that you have a profile update on your website.

10. TELL THEM WHO YOU ARE!

Most jurisdictions require every email you send out include details about your company – specifically your registered office address and company registration number - and give the recipient the opportunity to unsubscribe to or opt out of future email communications.

Your CRM system or email marketing program may action the requests automatically for you, but if not ensure you indicate clearly on the customer’s record which emails need suppressing.



BT Global Services need to have absolutely accurate prospect and customer contact data in order to meet their business growth objectives. They recognise that the value of their brand is at stake if they do not communicate the right message to the right contact.

CASE STUDY – CONTACT DATA

Project: Contact Data Quality Initiative – Phase II

Commissioned by: Sarah Lester, Senior Manager,
UK Marketing Operations, BT Global
Services

Business Challenge

BT Global Services need to have absolutely accurate prospect and customer contact data in order to meet their business growth objectives. They recognize that the value of their brand is at stake if they do not communicate the right message to the right contact. They must be able to drill down to key decision makers.

Scope

This database marketing project consisted of:

- a) Cleaning 18,000 data records from BT's CRM system, amending errors, removing duplications, adding missing data, identifying inactive contacts and finding replacement contacts. Business Advantage were required to check contact details without speaking to the named individuals to get an independent authentication.
- b) Acquisition of a minimum of 2,000 new contacts from within 590 named accounts across a range of 24 specified business functions.

Methodology

- a) Business Advantage were not allowed to contact the named individuals directly, therefore, a two stage approach was taken. Initially, data was gathered from public domain sources and secondly, these details were confirmed by calling receptionists, or where receptionists did not know the information, others within the relevant department.
- b) New contact information was gathered using telephone interview techniques.

BT had strict data formatting requirements, Sarah stated:

"Business Advantage were able to meet these requirements plus were able to provide the data in a ready-to-load format, thus avoiding time consuming data processing by internal BT staff."

Business Advantage also provided BT with weekly feedback via a conference call and a hard copy report. Sarah said:

"As a result of being kept in the loop with these helpful updates we were reassured that the priorities of the project remained on focus."

“We were very pleased with the new contacts Business Advantage found for us, it has made a big difference to our effective reach.”

Sarah Lester, Senior Manager, UK Marketing Operations, BT Global Services

Another challenge of this project was to collect email addresses, where this information was unavailable Business Advantage extrapolated naming conventions of colleagues and pinged across emails to these addresses to test viability.

Why choose Business Advantage?

This project was put out to tender and Business Advantage provided a proposal along with a number of other agencies. Information from all the proposals was consolidated and comparisons made.

“The results of the comparisons went through BT’s usual procurement channels and Business Advantage came out on top particularly in the areas of cost, approach, professionalism and flexibility.”

What impact did the result have on BT’s business?

Before the data was cleaned BT had some concerns about the quality of their data, Sarah commented:

“Now we are confident that the data is accurate and we do not have any concerns going forward.”

The acquisition of the 2,000 new contacts was also important to BT, Sarah commented:

“We were very pleased with the new contacts Business Advantage found for us, it has made a big difference to our effective reach.”

Sarah’s final comment

“All deliverables were met within agreed timescales and to agreed formats. I was very impressed by their professionalism and flexibility as well as the cost of the project. All the staff were very helpful. I have recommended them to colleagues and have used them since on two occasions for data cleaning and data acquisition projects.”

Sarah Lester, Senior Manager, UK Marketing Operations,
BT Global Services



"Business Advantage's excellent research skills and comprehensive understanding of our market have produced research results we know we can trust to underpin our marketing decisions. Recent surveys of our target markets discovered a high level of interest in our new product."

European Channel
Manager, Rasterex

BUSINESS ADVANTAGE – ABOUT US

If you plan to grow in a new way, perhaps by using one of the ideas above you should have an advantage, a business advantage. We've helped many companies make their growth journey as our market research and analyses always include actionable recommendations and implementation strategies.

Who we are

Formed in 1992 by CEO, Chris Turner, Business Advantage now has a professional staff of over 30 specialists in different markets, technologies and methodologies.

What we do

Business Advantage is a B2B research, business development and marketing consulting practice operating in the global IT, Digital Broadcasting and Telecommunications sectors. We specialise in:

- Marketing and management consultancy
- B2B market research
- Data services
- Sales development services.

Our mission

To out-perform your competitors, you must get key activities right: strategy and planning; acquiring accurate market intelligence and taking effective action to turn potential customers into real ones.

At Business Advantage, our commitment is to **help you create substantial and lasting improvements in your performance - a sustainable business advantage - over your competitors.**

Our Clients

Our clients include many leading international companies such as 3M, Autodesk, Canon, Dell, HP, Infor, IBM, Intel, Lexmark, Microsoft, , Oracle, SAP, Sony, Sophos, Synopsys, Xerox Engineering Systems and many small to medium sized organisations.

Additional Information

If you would like more information on this or other research, data or business development topics, please email info@business-advantage.com, call +44 1689 873636 or download other [Business Advantage White Papers](#).

Lastly – if all these tips are overwhelming please talk to us about some Consultancy to help you figure out your best email marketing approach ...