

Follow the rules

Four tenets ensure e-mail marketing victory

E-mail marketing is one of the most cost effective ways to get your name in front of prospective or existing customers to generate sales or stay top of mind. But the spam that clogs in-boxes around the world is unwanted, and its solicitations are rarely acted upon. These annoying distractions offer little value.

Now that we know what's wrong with this method of marketing, let's discuss what could be right with it.

By Michael Ferranti



E-mail marketing (please don't call it spam for just a moment until you consider the argument) offers one of the most cost-effective ways to market to consumers. Start-up cost are so small that any company can integrate a smartly designed campaign into its marketing program in short time. And, with a few well-established rules of engagement, chances are it will make a reasonable return on investment very quickly. In some cases, the results, like the Internet itself, are immediate.

Often ask company owners to think like their customers and answer the question, "Is my e-mail address worth parting with?"

What's more, e-mail isn't just a way to get your brand in front of people. It's an opportunity establish engagement and dialogue with customers. Here are a few rules of thumb that are sure to show success for even the newest e-marketers.

Rule No. 1: The e-mail must be anticipated.

Don't waste time and effort sending e-mails to recipients who don't need what you sell, don't want your products and know nothing about you.

We recommend sticking with opt-in e-mail lists to optimize results. If you don't have an address list of hot prospects primed to buy, you can build one in a number of different ways: You

can entice individuals to visit your Web site with special offers to those who opt-in; banner ads can drive people who have an interest in your offers; and of course, marketing materials of any kind should be included on your Web site. Once there, make it easy for people to act, driving your sales.

Rule No. 2: The e-mail must be relevant.

We recommend that our clients use information they gain about their customers selectively to keep them informed. If you are a jeweler, for example, and one of your customers purchased an anniversary ring for his wife in 2005, your messaging can remind this customer of the approaching date and also provide selective information about new jewelry designs and styles that would be perfect for the up-and-coming anniversary. This puts the sender in the position of providing information that is needed and wanted. It's time-sensitive, and it provides new product information based upon past behavior.

Rule No. 3: The e-mail must offer value.

Research shows that consumers act on offers of value more than anything else. For example, customers who bought widgets in the past are the perfect customers to buy widgets when they go on sale. The most successful e-mail marketing programs track this data and use it intelligently. I often ask company owners to think like their customers and answer the question, "Is my e-mail address worth parting with?" In this day and age, it's the equivalent of asking for a phone number that's privately listed.

Rule No. 4: The e-mail must be integrated.

For maximum benefit, your e-mail messaging must be integrated with both content and commerce feedback loops in the form of product upsells that leverage database data to meet needs - for example, the next most likely product model - and surveys that allow the customer to provide data points that are used to better serve and connect with the consumer.

Any company, regardless of size, can afford an e-mail marketing program. In this day and age, with the ease of measuring your real-time ROI, who can afford not to?

Michael Ferranti is CEO of Endai Worldwide, an Internet Marketing and Technology firm headquartered in New York City.