

eVELOPES

12 Common Mistakes in Email Marketing

Don't you simply adore these wonderful lists that spell out the potholes people typically fall into when they set about accomplishing a task?. Especially when you're about to embark on something as significant as an email campaign. A tidy collection of DONT's makes it hugely easier to catch your self before you take an obvious misstep and tumble down some weird rabbit hole just like Alice. Except Alice landed in an interesting place and learned a few things.

Let me tell you - when you fall into one of these holes, you don't wind up in a very interesting place (although you certainly can wind up learning from your mistakes, but who wants to waste that kind of time and money?). So how do you keep your head above ground? Just pay attention to these mistakes of email marketing, and you'll find yourself smiling like the Cheshire Cat!

Email marketing is, after all, a form of advertising. But it goes beyond conventional advertising, because it is also your principal pathway to building a long-lasting relationship with your customers. You really don't want to mess that up, do you?

I thought not. So let's look at these mistakes, one by one (you can remind yourself as you read each item, "This is a mistake - don't go there").

1. The desire for instant gratification

Launching an email campaign is like trying get your car rolling from a dead stop. You think you're going to manage it all in one push? Nope. It takes time to work up some momentum. And before you achieve a decent speed, you're going to start wondering if you are even up to the task. Be patient!

Studies have proved the only variable that influences the success of any campaign is the power of your message. So make sure you are saying the right thing. "Uncover the story that is uniquely yours; focus your campaign; commit to your message." And be prepared to give it time.

Once you get your momentum, it will be hard to stop it! Sure, along the way you're going to have to give the occasional push, but with the momentum established, the job becomes much easier.

2. Attempting to reach more people than the budget will allow

This is the reach versus frequency issue. Let's say you are going to buy inventory or place an ad in an email newsletter. You can afford to make 100,000 impressions. Do you go for 10 placements in one newsletter that goes out to 10,000 people, or do you opt for one placement that goes out to 100,000 people? Same number of impressions, but the first option exposes fewer viewers to multiple impressions.

Think about it this way: Would you rather reach 100% of the people and convince them 10% of the way of them, or reach 10% of the people and convince all of them all the way? When it comes to maximizing your email marketing efforts, this is a useful analogy: Your message is the nail, repetition is the hammer, and a block of wood is the customer. If the nail is sharp and you hammer effectively, you will pierce through the wood and clinch the customer.

For more information on this topic, check out the article below written by Bryan Eisenberg in ClickZ.

Your finger is poised on the "Send" button. You feel satisfied that your message is poised to accomplish its goal, but a voice from within asks, "Will we make any money from this?" To help answer that question, make sure you're thinking of your emails not as letters, but as advertisements.

You send one of four message types in an email communication to your list: a message that drives action (buy now), a message that builds relationships (builds identity, or "brand"), a message that simply provides information, or a message that is sucked into the black hole of cyberspace (the "Deleted" folder).

We'll ignore the last two because they don't help your business results. Buy-now messages are immediate, direct response-type messages by nature, while build-identity messages are aimed at meeting deeper, more long-term goals. Don't make me put on my flame-resistant suit, but I would argue that, whatever your main purpose, some emails can do both. Either way, what we are really trying to do is get people's "share of mind."

For us to maximize our efforts at capturing mind share, we should understand some physiological processes working in peoples' brains. Short-term memory is electrical; long-term memory is chemical. Most of what we keep in electrical memory is lost during the night; sleep causes the information to fade.

We can only do three things to increase the transfer of our messages from electrical memory to chemical memory: increase the relevancy of the message, increase the frequency of its repetition, or both. Branding is accomplished only when you have a relevant message that is repeated with enough frequency to become stored in chemical memory.

You can now see why many e-commerce companies do not have award-winning newsletters. They seem to be focused on delivering short-term, buy-now messages. Even Amazon.com does it. The company delivers relevant messages, but notice how it hedges its bets, including an "add to wish list" option, knowing that people might not act immediately upon the delivery of the message.

If e-commerce companies wanted to be more successful, they could add long-term, brand-building messages into their mix. You can find a good example of a long-term branding newsletter at [Thane](#). The company's newsletter is devoid of pitches, and you can find only two links -- one at the top, and one at the bottom. Both lead directly to the Thane site. The company provides high-value content, such as the following from its Weight Loss newsletter, which (hopefully) helps it establish itself as a high-value brand:

Fat burning describes a form of energy supply by the body. Here free fatty acids (FFA), which are created during the breakdown of fat deposits, are "burned without flame," i.e., oxidized. This process is, in comparison to energy extraction from glucose, quite complicated and cumbersome, but it sets free much more energy for the same amount of "fuel." Fat burning takes place all over the body, all of the time. Fat reduction describes a long-lasting process of body weight reduction through the reduction of the body fat component. Fat reduction and fat burning have to initially be viewed as independent of each other. While fat burning takes place constantly and all over the body, a fat reduction will only take place if the body receives less energy than it needs over a longer period of time. In this relation we talk about a negative energy balance.

All of this reaches to the heart of the global advertising debate: reaching the right people versus saying the right thing. Some analytical marketing person once said, "The secret to more effective advertising is to reach the right people." It sounded like it made sense then, and it sounds like it makes sense today. The only problem is that it isn't true. Attempting to reach the right people has led to more mistakes, frustration, and failures than any other myth in the history of commerce.

Attempting to reach the right people usually leads to overtargeting and a false sense of confidence. It begins when the marketing person says, "I've got the right people." Since you believe this is what matters most, you buy into what he is selling. When the campaign fails, you don't consider the fact that your ad was not persuasive or that it was not given enough repetition. You simply say, "He didn't have

the right people after all." You blame the radio station for having the wrong type of listener, the direct mail company for having a bad list, and the Web site for having the wrong traffic.

Business owners are frustrated with their advertising because they keep trying to make it a science. It's not a science. Although there are many principles to follow, there are no written-in-stone, scientific rules. The assumption that any one advertising vehicle can provide you with exclusive access to, and attention from, a particular group of people is simply ridiculous. Every person is reached by multiple vehicles of advertising on a daily basis. Just think how many messages are deleted from your in box each day.

Having the right message is what matters. It's not who you reach, it's what you say. Are you spending most of your time and money trying to reach the right person, or are you focused on making sure you're saying the right things?

And it doesn't hurt to remember this: "Retention fades with sleep."
Repetition has its rewards.

3. Assuming the business owner knows best

When it comes to stuff in which we you have a huge personal investment (your children, your home, your business), you risk losing your objectivity. It's a human thing. Too much knowledge about your company and what you offer leads you to answer questions nobody is asking. When you're inside the bottle, it's hard to read the label. But that's also when you risk pushing your own interests at the expense of your customers' interests. Sometimes it helps to bring in an objective outsider to give you some perspective.

4. Unsubstantiated claims

People make claims all the time that miss targeting their customers' needs and simply wind up turning them off. Specifics about yourself, your way of doing business and your products are far more persuasive and cut to the chase far more effectively than generalities. So get credibly specific!!

5. Improper use of passive media

Passive media are sight-based media - newspapers, magazines, billboards, direct mail, and yes, even email - that require the user to sustain focused attention in order to process the message. Intrusive media are sound-based - radio and television. Sound is heads above sight in its ability to get your message lodged into your customers' brains. The best use of passive media is as a follow-up to intrusive media.

This is a toughie, and there's not much you can do about it at this stage of the technological game. It is largely one of those obstacles you have to factor into your marketing equation. Trust me, now is not the time to go lining your emails with .wav files - and that misses the point anyway. The huge advantage of email marketing, passive though it may be, is its relative low cost. It's worth the effort, but be aware of the limitations.

Passive media is an effective way to reach those customers who are actively in the market for your product or service. You'll improve the effectiveness of your emails if you can use this to your advantage. Exactness is the key attribute of passive media - you can give a lot of specifics that your potential customers can check as many times as they want, simply by revisiting their online mail boxes.

6. Creating individual emails instead of campaigns.

Remember the hammer analogy from last time? Good. Now add this: No single ad constitutes a campaign, Rome wasn't built in a day, and friendship isn't a first-sight phenomenon. You have more to say and more to accomplish than can be said and accomplished in a single email.

A very important thing to do as you develop your campaign is build upon your previous (successful) efforts. Your individual emails have to be interconnected, with a logical flow and a united presentation - after all, they are all pieces of that big "puzzle" that is your company. You want to keep your customers eager and on the lookout for more of what you have to offer.

7. Obedience to unwritten rules.

Do you really want to be like everyone else? Do you want to communicate the same message as your competitors? No, of course not. You want to be unique, you want to stand out from the crowd. So don't follow it! Dare to be different in a believable way. That's how you get noticed. I'm not suggesting you go overboard (commercial relationship-building requires tact and tends toward the conservative end of the spectrum), but if your emails sound, act and look like everybody else's emails, what's the value in doing business with you rather than them?

8. Ignoring timing.

It should come as no surprise that you've got to think about timing your message. Who is your audience and when are they most likely to read your email? Rebecca Leib presents some very useful information on timing in her article

BY [Rebecca Lieb](#) | 10-4-2001

Timing isn't everything, but it's pretty important... to everyone but email marketers, who seem to ignore the issue entirely. A recent [ClickZ column](#) enumerated over 50 -- that's right, five-oh -- to-dos when planning an email marketing campaign. Not once did my esteemed colleagues pose the question: *When* do you hit the send button? In a rush to conduct business in Internet time, we've forgotten customer time.

Not that I'm singling out my ClickZ colleagues. Why isn't *anyone* asking this? Broadcast marketers think about this constantly; so do the folks who run cola ads in movie theatres right before the feature. A PR pro would never issue a press release on Friday afternoon after the issue's put to bed. It's not just placement, and it's not just relevance. It's timing.

Timing influences just about everything we do. It influences the macro stuff, such as getting up, going to work, eating, and sleeping as well as the more subtle, refined decisions that incorporate the elements of a successful email campaign: targeting, optimization, personalization, messaging, calls to actions, and analysis. Ever left someone a voice mail message when you knew you couldn't reach him (and didn't want to)? Accidentally on purpose run into a colleague in the hall you'd been wanting to speak with? Worn a snazzy new suit the day of the big meeting? Come in early (or stayed late) to conference in with the other coast?

I've yet to hear of anyone taking timing into account in planning an email campaign. If you are, I'd love to hear what you're doing. In the meantime, here are some timely ideas that could be incorporated into a campaign without too much fuss -- and could up your return on investment (ROI).

- Time of day opt-in: Ask people opting-in for email or newsletters not only what, but also when, they'd like to receive mail from you.
- Geographical segmentation: Your list may include addresses, ZIP Codes, or domain names that reveal the time zones of recipients. Use that data in your targeting.
- When do they buy what you sell? Solicitations from online grocers during business hours? Business-to-business (B2B) propositions on the weekend? Take a look at what time of day your customers place their orders, and synch mailings accordingly.
- Is it live on the site? Amazon.com's usually a paragon of email marketing virtue. So why does it send the notification for its weekly Friday sale on Thursday evening, EST, before the merchandise is live on the site -- and before you can buy it? This issue is particularly relevant for limited-time or quantity offers.
- Gather relevant customer data or extrapolate from existing information, and time mailings accordingly. Say you're a job site and mail daily updates of openings tailored to subscribers' criteria. Have you asked if they're actively searching or "just looking"? More casual users might shy away from an inbox filled with mail from HotJobs or Monster.com during office hours. They unsubscribe, your traffic sinks, along with your cost per thousand (CPM). If you're sending local movie listings, Friday afternoon might be just right.
- Consistency: If you mail regularly, shoot for a schedule. Monday mornings, the first of the month, whatever. If your messages are good enough, you'll have customers looking forward to hearing from you. Create a rhythm, then ride it.
- As a last resort, think day part. If your email technology can't pinpoint prospects when their hearts are as open to your call to action as their pocketbooks are to your buy button, take a wild guess. B2B or rich media pitches are obviously going to work better during Internet prime time -- office hours. That's where the bandwidth and mind share is. Pitches for hobbies, things to share with the kids, a vacation you'd want to talk over with a partner -- those are leisure-time decisions. You probably want those messages arriving when recipients are more likely to spend some quality time considering them.

Your goal is to give your customers the right message and send it when they are apt to take the time to read it. This isn't the same as suggesting you should time your message to exactly when you think your customer is going to act on it. Seasonal situations aside, an important tenet of advertising is this: "Tell the customer WHY and wait for WHEN. Stop trying to predict the moment of need."¹¹

9. Overtargeting

Be careful to avoid over-segmenting your data base in your efforts to reach your target audience. It's a myth that you only need to get your message to the decision-makers. Truth is, decisions are seldom made in a vacuum. Don't neglect the influencers!

10. Event-driven marketing

It's best to steer clear of designing an email campaign around a single event (unless it's a major, well-branded event that strengthens your Unique Selling Proposition). When an event is over, folks will immediately forget the marketing pitch behind it, and besides, 99.5% of the people you've spent the effort to reach won't be coming to The Do anyway. Where does your message go when this happens? Up in tendrils of smoke.

11. Great production without great copy

"Slick, clever, funny, creative and different are very poor substitutes for informative, believable, memorable and persuasive." The name of the ebusiness game is persuasion; getting people to take the action you want them to take. Don't even dream of neglecting those magical words that are going to help you craft your brilliant, perfect message.

12. Confusing "response" with "results"

"Slick, clever, funny, creative and different ads are most likely to generate comment, or response." Buzz doesn't feed the bulldog and excitement alone won't bring in the cash. See the problem?

I recently heard a great saying: Intelligent people learn from their own mistakes; wise people learn from the mistakes of others. Now you've got all 12 of the most frequently made mistakes in email marketing, and you're in a great position to learn from them