

EMAIL MARKETING
BEST
PRACTICES

2011

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Investigating the Trends and Best Practices of Email Marketing

Though more glamorous methods may have pretensions to the crown, [email marketing](#) is still hands down one of the most effective forms of internet marketing around. Businesses large and small have been using it for years to stay in touch with their audience, create awareness, and build relationships. When executed with precision, an email marketing strategy can foster loyalty, drive sales, and keep customers coming back for more.

At a glance, the [email campaign](#) is a fairly simple concept. You put together a list of contacts, send them your newsletter or sales offer, and reap the rewards of their actions. If only it were that easy. To see genuine returns on your investment, you must be proactive about identifying the marketing trends and best practices that could impact your business both positively and negatively.

In this report we will build on the foundation established in [How to Start Email Marketing](#). We will discuss how to avoid spam filters by branding your subject lines and establishing your reputation with your subscriber, designing landing pages that conveniently direct your user to their next click-through, scheduling [autoresponders](#), and optimizing your social media presence. Finally, we will close by touching upon the latest email marketing trends and how they may (or may not) determine the future of better campaigns.

Spam and You

If you have decided to indulge in email marketing, chances are you have committed yourself for the long haul. No need to back out and call it quits when so many potential benefits are within easy reach. If you are indeed in it to win it, there is one perception you must constantly try to fight off – spam. These days the average inbox is on a hair trigger when it comes to new or unknown email, and this factor alone makes it much harder for you to have success with your campaigns.

Spam is a permission-based marketer's worst enemy. The people (and bots) that fire off junk mail have bruised the eye of the email marketing community, causing recipients to give every message that isn't sent by a friend or relative a questionable glare. The situation has spiraled out of control to the point



where the entire perception of spam has shifted. No longer is it merely viewed as unsolicited **bulk email** that has been sent without obtaining permission. Spam is now anything the recipient does not want or find relevant.

In today's email arena, an offer that doesn't match the recipient's preference or interest can easily be perceived as spam. The same person who willingly signed up to your mailing list could click that dreaded button ISPs have made so conveniently accessible in their mail client.

Your subscribers entered the email relationship with you for a reason: they want to hear from you. More importantly, they want to receive marketing content that benefits them. It is a game of exchange and you must play your part in the tradeoff. Fail to deliver and they will group you in the same boat with the rest of the nagging spammers who get ignored, deleted, and reported.

So how do you shake the perception of spam? Start fighting it from the beginning of the relationship. Here are some tips that will help you stand out from the crowd:

- **Deliver a Timely Welcome Message** - If you wait a month, or even a week, to introduce yourself to a new subscriber they may forget all about you and assume that you are sending them spam. This perception can be avoided by immediately delivering a welcome message, preferably one complete with a brief overview of the benefits you have to offer, a frequency refresher, and a link that directs them to a location where they can manage their preferences.
- **Get in the Address Book** – Getting your subscribers to include you to their list of approved senders can make your life as an **email marketer** much easier. A visible call to action that asks them to add your email address or domain to their address book is all it takes. This tactic is so effective that it is now widely considered a best practice. If the subscriber truly wants to hear from you, they will happily add you to their **whitelist**.
- **Brand Your Subject Lines** – It is very common for email recipients to scan their messages before deciding if they will actually read them. Branding your subject line is an effective way to help a recipient make up his or her mind. Something as simple as including your company name in the **subject line** can make you stand out in the inbox and compel the recipient to open your message.



Differentiating yourself from pernicious spammers is a never ending mission, one that lasts throughout the duration of your relationship with your subscribers. There are many actions you can take, but all of them can prove futile if you go beyond your advertised frequency and contact your subscribers too often. If you initially told them to expect to hear from you twice a month, sending a sales offer every week is not the best idea. But giving recipients the option to receive more frequent mail (via [signup form](#)) is a better idea. Some actions in the fight against spam are complex and tedious; others are simple and straightforward.

Prepare for Landing

The overarching goal of email marketing is to achieve conversions. Whether it is subscribing to a newsletter or making a purchase, you want the reader to leave that email window and take a specific action somewhere else. In most cases the obvious destination is your website. However, it can't be just any old web page. This action must take place on your [landing page](#), the page you optimize to greet the reader after they make that fateful click.

You know that saying about how you only have a matter of seconds to impress a potential customer? Well, it applies all the way from your subject line to your landing page. If this page is crafted poorly, it could be the last time the reader ever takes you up on a [call to action](#). Losing potential customers will be the least of your worries when you know how to optimize your landing page to:

- **Create Familiarity** – Clicking on an email link might be an uncomfortable experience for some of your subscribers. In a single click, they are directed away from the secure confinement of their inbox to the treacherous web where anything goes. You can calm those fears by letting them know they have arrived safely in the right destination. Make sure your message is consistent, design and all, and it will create familiarity that has them feeling at ease once they arrive on your landing page.
- **Guide the Visitor** – So you convinced the reader to [click-through](#) and visit your website. Now what? If your landing page is not designed to guide them through the process, they certainly won't have a clue. A good landing page will let the visitor know exactly what they need to do in order to take the next critical step in the conversion process. Convince them to become a member of your site. Pitch them a clever sales incentive. Promote



a partner's product. Whatever you do, just don't leave them hanging.

- **Keep It Simple** – The bells and whistles we see in the inbox with HTML are nothing compared to the glitz and glamour on the web. Technologies such as AJAX, Flash, and Ruby on Rails make it possible to wow your visitors with an unforgettable experience. All this dynamic content is great for visual effect, but not necessary for a landing page. Not everyone is working with the latest hi-tech computer. Realizing this, you should keep the design of your landing page simple and focus on getting the visitor to take the next step.

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Though it exists on the web, the landing page is one of the most important components of your email campaign. It is the key to generating the conversions you need to continually thrive, so a strategy that accounts for design, keywords, calls to action, and other elements is necessary in order to make it a good one.

Engage and Retain

For every opportunity email marketing has to offer, there is a challenge that is potentially even greater. It's cost effective, but can be cost prohibitive if you steer efforts in the wrong direction. It gives you a convenient way to keep in touch with your audience, but too much or too little contact and you will lose them. It can help you establish credibility, but tarnish your reputation if the best practices are not followed. Perhaps the biggest challenge it presents is keeping your subscribers active, engaged, and on your list.

You've worked hard to build your list, and retaining the people on it should be among your top priorities. Email is the perfect tool for the job of course, but with consumers being overwhelmed by spam and the grind of everyday life, it often takes much more than a relevant offer to retain your subscribers. The following three-step exercises will demonstrate how you can keep subscribers engaged and in-tune with your marketing message:

Launch Drip Marketing Campaigns

An event-based **drip campaign** is an effective technique that allows you to keep the dialogue with your audience flowing through automated messages. Properly timed **autoresponders** can be set up to drive your welcome messages and follow ups, shopping cart abandonment campaigns, event reminders, and birthday incentive



programs.

1. Deploy campaigns based on predefined triggers.
2. Engage subscribers through relevant communications.
3. Qualify leads and nurture them through the sales cycle.

Target Based on Engagement Level

For the most part, being able to keep your subscribers engaged is dependent on understanding how engaged they are to begin with. When you know who is responding to your message in terms of opens, clicks, and other actions, it becomes much easier to pinpoint just who is engaged and who isn't with [targeted emails](#).



1. Segment and target your list by action (opens, clicks, purchases, etc.).
2. Create re-engagement campaigns to win back subscribers who haven't responded to your message in "X" amount of days.
3. Remove subscribers you are unable to successfully re-engage to maintain the quality of your list.

Test and Respond Accordingly

The importance of testing cannot be underestimated or overstated. Regular testing can give you a better idea of what works and what doesn't before deploying your campaigns.

1. Test subject lines, copy, images, frequency, calls to actions, etc.
2. Deploy your email campaigns based on the results of testing.
3. Boost engagement levels, response rates, and ROI.

Although you are always working to build your contact list for the sake of growing your business, the most valuable subscribers are the ones you already have. Being able to keep them may take some hard work, but it is all worth it when they reward your business with their continued loyalty and support.

The Social Email Marketer

Email marketing's effectiveness increases greatly when bundled together with other

marketing techniques. With social media being all the rage and so flexible, it is arguably the best channel to combine with your email efforts. More brands are coming to realize this, and while few have learned the true secret to success, there are some currently reaping the benefits of social sharing, such as:

- **Greater reach**
- **Increased awareness**
- **Enhanced communications**
- **Word of mouth marketing**
- **More sales**

Social media offers uncapped potential as a marketing tool, yet many businesses have not incorporated this channel into their email marketing strategy. Some are intimidated by the hurdles ahead. For others, time is an issue. Taking the social media plunge can be both challenging and time consuming but it is well worth it. Following are some examples of how you can bring these two channels together for the benefit of your business:



- **Tweet Your Email Content** – If you have must-see content, Twitter is the perfect tool to use to promote it. Whether it is your monthly newsletter or just a solid email, send out a tweet equipped with a link to the web version so others can check it out. This is an easy way to extend your reach and give your content a chance for greater impact.



- **Add a Sign-up Form on Your Fan Page** - The people you connect with on Facebook are the perfect candidates for your mailing list. Why not provide an easy way for them to join you by adding a [sign-up form](#) on your fan page? Benchmark Email makes this a convenient process that can be completed in a few simple steps.
- **Get Email Subscribers to Follow** – If you have a social media presence, you should make it known in your email campaigns. Including icons and links invites your subscribers to connect with you on social networks. A study published by GetResponse showed that social media links improve email click-through rates by 30%.

- **Add Social Sharing Buttons** – Sites like Digg, Delicious, and StumbleUpon have shown us that the share button can be a powerful weapon. While these buttons have become commonplace on the web, they can also be added to your email messages. Incorporating [social sharing buttons](#) gives readers a convenient way to share your content and resonates beyond the email channel.

Not every brand is suited for a dive in the social web, but combining it with email marketing could be exactly what is needed to accelerate your business. These two channels have proven to be an ideal match, and we have still yet to see what this couple is truly capable of. Getting in on the ground level of this emerging trend could pay off on multiple fronts.

The Trends of 2011

2010 was a breakout year for social media in the internet marketing world. So what trends do we have to look forward to in 2011? Here are some you may want to keep an eye on:

- **Mobile Marketing** – Analysts have been talking about the inevitable explosion of mobile marketing for years. To no surprise, experts are predicting that it will make an even bigger splash in 2011. With email being one of the most widely used features across all major smartphone platforms, a mobile marketing strategy is definitely something to think about.
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- **Marketing Automation** – 2011 could potentially be the year of marketing automation systems. These fully integrated solutions are particularly useful for marketers in the B2B segment, providing a convenient way to launch and manage email campaigns, qualify leads, and nurture them through the sales cycle.
- **Deal-of-the-Day** – Groupon is one of last year's hot trends that will undoubtedly carry over into 2011. Consumers love this new concept simply because it offers bargains and cost savings. For marketers, it offers the opportunity to create awareness and drive revenue. Some hail the Groupon model as email marketing at its best. At the very least, you may be able to observe and pick up some targeting trends that enable you to make more of an impact with your sales offers.
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When it comes to email marketing and the internet world in general, new trends are emerging on the scene all the time. While some may be worthwhile, you shouldn't be so quick to jump on every one that comes along. The above trends are hot at the moment, but keep in mind that consumers tend to adopt new technology at a much slower pace than marketers. The best practices are the ones that help you build your relationship with your customers and earn their loyalty. These are the trends that will never go out of style.

About Benchmark Email

Take powerful features by the dozen, sophisticated list management, hundreds of email templates, ultra-precise reports and dazzling email and video email. Now, package all that together for an extremely affordable price. Sound appealing? That's us.

There's a reason – or 100 – that more than 73,000 users trust us with their email marketing campaigns. With a second-to-none feature set, headache-free tools that make every campaign a snap and extremely reasonable price plans, we're the email marketing service for businesses of all shapes and sizes.

At Benchmark, we're more than email marketing experts, we're innovators. Our main aim is to perfect our email marketing service, but we also follow social networking, search engine optimization (SEO) and Web 2.0 just so our 100% Web-based software is completely compatible with the ever-changing Internet world.

No other service gives you this robust, standard range of features for just \$9.95 a month to start. Find out for yourself by enrolling in our free, 30 day trial at www.benchmarkemail.com/register.

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