

M4Internet 10 Deadly Sins of E-mail Marketing

E-mail marketing has proven to be the most efficient and effective way to engage customers and potential clients. Yet as promising as it can be, a number of common mistakes are often made that can prevent you from reaping the benefits of this effective marketing channel.

With a wide variety of e-mail marketing solutions now available on the Internet, the ability to start an email marketing program is easier than ever. As you develop and manage your e-mail marketing programs, M4Internet offers advice to help increase your ROI.

1. Launching without a comprehensive plan

More often than not, companies start broadcasting e-mail messages to a list of addresses without a solid understanding of what they really want to achieve. A “Ready. Fire! Aim.” approach, more often than not, falls flat. While time-to-market is important, it is critical to take time to plan the basics. To achieve positive performance results, a good plan should include both a compelling value proposition to the customer and the goals that you hope to achieve. A comprehensive e-mail marketing plan will include all of the following components:

- A compelling value proposition to the customer
- A clear customer acquisition strategy
- An estimate of mailing frequency
- Clear and concise message content with a call to action
- An understanding of the measurements for gauging success

2. Not identifying yourself properly

You are more likely to communicate with someone you know, a fact about personal communication that applies to e-mail communication as well. In order to get a positive response to your messages, recipients must be able to quickly and easily identify that the message is from a familiar source.

When people receive e-mail, they look first to the "From" field in the message to see who sent the message. In e-mail, there are two possible "From" addresses that are visible in the message header: A "Friendly From" that appears in some e-mail client software programs ("Microsoft Customer Service"), and a "Machine From", the address of the specific e-mail account that sent the message (service@microsoft.com). It is important to clearly identify your company in both the "Friendly From" and "Machine From" fields so that recipients can easily recognize your company as the source of the message. Given the amount of unsolicited e-mail today, your e-mail must clearly be sent from you. A "Machine From" address such as will get opened more often and generate a higher response than a message that is delivered from

3. Not obtaining permission

Obtaining permission to send e-mail messages to individuals is a key to receiving a positive response. If you want to see reasonable results and a positive ROI, you must receive permission before delivering email.

It's not altogether uncommon how companies might attempt to start an e-mail marketing program by assembling e-mail addresses from a variety of sources. They then start sending their message to the list without first obtaining permission from the recipients. With this approach companies find that response rates nearly equal complaint rates, and that relationships with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are potentially endangered. Companies often pay the price for messages to be delivered, while the recipients do not want to hear the message and delete the messages sight unseen.

Unlike the traditional postal world where the sending party pays the full cost of mail delivery, the recipient of an e-mail message most often pays for the cost of receiving e-mail messages. They pay an ISP and/or purchase e-mail software. This is one reason why obtaining permission to deliver e-mail is important. ISPs and anti-SPAM organizations routinely block Internet domains that deliver unsolicited e-mail messages so that messages from your company's Internet domain will no longer be accepted. Once this happens, getting your company's Internet domain unblocked by these organizations is a time-consuming process.

Finally, complaints about unsolicited e-mail shouldn't be taken lightly. Those people who complain about receiving unwanted e-mail from you have already associated your brand or product with their displeasure. To avoid these problems, clearly ask individuals for permission to deliver e-mail to an individual BEFORE sending your message. Do this with a web-based form, affiliate partnerships or by means of traditional direct marketing tactics. People who want to hear from you will respond more positively, complain less often and will produce better returns on your e-mail marketing investment.

4. Purchasing e-mail lists

Many companies start their e-mail marketing program by purchasing e-mail address lists from a variety of third party sources and end up frustrated with poor results. This approach generally produces poor response results and a large number of complaints to be dealt with.

Taking formal ownership of an e-mail list through a purchase transaction does not mean you have received permission to send e-mail to the individuals on the list. In short, e-mail permission cannot be transferred to third parties, except in a very few rare cases. Your message will most likely be viewed as SPAM by a large majority of recipients on these purchased lists, as they will not recognize your company and the audience will have little or no interest in your message. This is especially the case if the message content you are sending has little or nothing to do with the content that was originally delivered to the list by the original list owner.

There are only a few cases we are aware of where purchasing e-mail lists worked. If you were to acquire ownership of an e-mail list through the takeover of a failing business and you were to improve the customer experience and provide a replacement product or service for instance, it is possible that the e-mail marketing opportunity you acquired could produce positive results. These cases are far from the norm, and in general, purchasing lists will lead to a poor response, poor ROI and frustration for both you and your recipients. Having a third party advertise on your behalf or through a special offer is a much more effective alternative. Your recipients are expecting to see e-mail from this sender and have already given permission to see such offers.

5. Sending generic messages

Although creating an e-mail message from a generic design template can save some time, this will limit your results and produce a lower response from your audience. It is worth your time to create your own unique message template specific to your audience and achieve a higher response because you have personalized the content. For example, if your strategy is to sell Nokia phones to teenagers, a message aimed at generic cell phone users will not produce as high a response as a message that highlights the exciting interchangeable keypad covers and multiple ring tones.

6. Overlooking file sizes

Your e-mail message content may look wonderful with all of your corporate graphics, logos, photos or attachments appended, but realize the importance of the size of your message is when it comes to successful delivery. Again, message recipients bear the cost of paying for email storage so it is important to respect your customers' e-mail inbox.

Limit the message file size to under 30kb unless you have previously established an expectation with your audience that they will receive larger messages. Also, unless there is an expectation of receiving file attachments, it is not a good idea to attach files to your email messages. E-mail attachments are most often associated with viruses, and many email systems will discard attachments on delivery.

Recipients may also use dialup connections to the Internet, making the download of a large file painfully slow. To avoid customer complaints and hassles follow the < 30kb rule of thumb.

7. Forgetting to test your message thoroughly

We can't stress enough the importance of testing your e-mail message content in a variety of environments. An e-mail broadcast audience utilizes a wide range of computer systems, operating systems and e-mail software. Just because your content looks great in one configuration doesn't mean it won't break your HTML into bits in others.

Always test your e-mail before you press the send button in the leading Internet browsers (Explorer, Navigator), e-mail client software (Outlook, Eudora) and major Internet domains (AOL, Yahoo, Hotmail). Nothing will sink your e-mail campaign faster than HTML or links that are broken when your recipients open your message.

Also be sure to test the various e-mail message formats as well: HTML, AOL, and text. Your HTML message may look great in Outlook, but AOL users may receive broken messages full of code. Testing your content thoroughly is essential for positive results.

8. Forgetting the importance of internal communication

It is not uncommon for businesses managing large-scale e-mail campaigns to forget to set proper expectations internally within their own organization. This can lead to disastrous results.

The classic problem case follows: You've orchestrated an incredibly successful e-mail campaign. Your newsletter offer was so compelling that customers are surfing your website en masse, calling customer support and your company switchboard. But, your website goes down because you forgot to tell your IT department to expect a heavier than normal amount of traffic. And, your phone lines are busy because phone traffic is swamping your switchboard because you did not tip-off your Operations staff. And, your Customer Support department can't answer questions to potential customers inquiring about the offer because they were uninformed.

Communicating details about your e-mail campaign throughout your organization is a key to overall success. Let them know about your offers, when they will drop and what your expectations are for response for best results.

9. Failure to track and analyze previous campaign history

Successful direct marketing programs have mechanisms in place to track and gauge success or failure. One of the major benefits of e-mail marketing is that direct response feedback can be obtained in real-time, enabling marketers to quickly adjust their campaign for success. E-mail marketing technology enables a marketer to track metrics such as message open rates, link click-through rates, unsubscribe rates, even the rates at which customers are performing a call-to-action activity on a website. It is important to understand how these rates can be used to gauge and build more effective marketing campaigns.

A common mistake made by many companies is overlooking the importance of historical e-mail response data feedback when developing a campaign. Many companies send out their message without having the ability to track the rates at which the message is being opened, or that call-to-action links are being clicked. Many e-mail marketing systems track and record each individual's email response history as well, which enables marketers to be able to target message responders specifically.

It is extremely helpful to take the past response history data into account. For example, if you are able to determine that offers for hair care products generate the highest e-mail open rate responses from women between the ages of 18-35, it would improve your ROI by specifically targeting that audience segment when delivering future campaigns.

Knowledge of historical e-mail campaign response data will help you improve your email campaign results, but you must start by ensuring that all of the basic metrics are being tracked and recorded initially.

10. Overlooking the importance of delivering compelling message content

From the subject line to the body of the message, what you write and how it is presented is a key to getting your e-mail opened and generating a response. In short, content matters.

A common mistake many companies make is overlooking the value of the content within the e-mail message to your audience. You've spent weeks working on the details of delivering an e-mail campaign and you're ready to go. What many companies fail to realize initially, however, is that your audience may not have a care in the world about the content you are planning to send. For example, does an audience of online shoppers really care about receiving your company's newsletter featuring the stock performance of your company?

It may seem basic, but if you want a positive response and results with your campaign, keep in mind that your content must have a call-to-action that is relevant and compelling to your audience.

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The M4Internet solution is comprised of proprietary email technologies; tools and solutions that have been developed in direct response to our customers needs.

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