

What's New in Email Marketing: Part 3

How to improve customer engagement with email

The adage 'It's not what you do, it's how you do it that makes the difference' applies well to email marketing. Peter Ellis of Being Communications continues his series of reports covering what's 'new' in email marketing and what makes the difference.

What's the best time to send your email?

Everyone has an opinion on the best time to send an email to an audience to maximise engagement. The optimal time will vary for different audiences, but what is certain is that there are times when an email should not be sent. You will always get a higher response when your audience are actively using their email which means during office hours for business audiences. We have seen cases where emails are broadcast at night to reduce server load, time zones or because of the size of the list takes so long to send. This is an email marketing fail.

There are also general industry recognised 'dead zone' times during each day when emails ideally should not be sent. Again in engagement terms, sending at these times is an email marketing fail.

10PM – 9AM “The Abyss” - an ineffective time to send email promotions

9AM – 10AM “Consumer AM” – the second most popular opening time is at the beginning of the working day when consumers are open to offers on a whole range of subjects

10AM – Noon “Do not disturb” – busy at work time, not opening non-related emails

Noon – 2PM “The lunchtime News” - Consumers are more likely to spend time on news and magazine alerts during lunch breaks than opening emails

2PM – 3PM “Do not disturb” – busy at work time, not opening non-related emails

3PM – 5PM “A life-changing afternoon” - Job-related apathy sets in, meaning more emails relating to property and financial services are opened at this time

5PM- 7PM “Working late” - There is a dramatic rise in holiday promotions being opened and this is also the most likely time for recipients to open B2B promotions emails

7PM – 10PM “Last Orders” – This is the most popular opening time. Recipients are more likely to respond to consumer promotions in their own time

So taking time of day into account, the best ways to engage include:

1. Broadcasting your emails when your audience are most likely to be logged on. This is obvious, but we know of several large organisations that send emails during the night to save on server load! Results of tests suggest that the email will have the greatest impact if it arrives in the recipient's inbox while they are using the computer. For organisations with larger lists with thousands of names where broadcasts have to be queued and throttled back to avoid delivering too many emails per hour, smart broadcasting may be required to deliver at the best time.

2. Reviewing your web analytics / web site statistics to determine peak usage time. Following on from the previous point, you can determine when users are most likely to be at their desk from your site statistics. For example, many business sites have their peak volume of visitors on a Tuesday, suggesting Tuesday may be the best day for sending your newsletter. This could also suggest that for consumer audiences, evenings or weekends might be the best time to dispatch.

3. Monday is the worst week day, Tuesday to Thursday are the best days for business audiences. It's difficult to generalise, but for business customers, we want the email to arrive when they will give it the most of their attention, then we are looking for times in the week when business people are likely to be less busy. Industry wisdom dictates that the best day of the week for email broadcasting is either Tuesday or Thursday.

4. Friday can be good. Business users are winding down and are often more likely to read a newsletter, act on a viral campaign or even respond to consumer offers. Emails sent on Friday may be viewed by home users at the weekend when they have more time to access their computers. Some marketers get the best of both worlds by sending on Thursday.

5. Test. The only real way to determine the best time for different audiences and different types of offers is to test.

What about engaging audiences using event-triggered email?

Event triggered emails are one of the most powerful types of email in delivering engagement and sales. This is because they are contextual emails which are delivered at the right time in the relationship when the customers are interested in dialogue.

Typically these are automated emails which are scheduled to be broadcast based on subscriber behaviour during the development of their relationship with the company. It's mostly common sense but this is the review process we recommend to maximise engagement:

1.

Establish the strategic importance of event-triggered and contextual customer lifecycle emails within your organisation and create an implementation plan. Many organisations do not devote the resource to these since they are separate from other campaign emails. It will require digital and traditional direct marketers and the web site team working together to create a plan. (Or digital roadmap as we call it at Being)

2.

Review options and prioritise implementation of event-triggered emails. These are some of the most common lifecycle-based event-triggered emails.

Lifecycle stage	Communications strategy and goals
Subscriber	Subscriber welcome strategy. Increase brand familiarity, develop brand preference
First time purchaser	Customer welcome strategy. Welcome purchaser and educate about brand and related products. Optionally survey about purchase experience.
Inactive purchaser	Purchaser reactivation strategy. Identify declining purchasing and prompt purchase
Inactive subscriber	Re-engagement strategy. Identify and reduce declining engagement

3.

Possible examples of triggered emails include:

- Customer acquisition
- Welcome email(s) on registration
- Initial purchase offer following subscription to newsletter (but no purchase)
- Customer conversion
- Abandoned shopping cart emails
- Site registered, not purchased after set interval
- Click email link on specific product or category, but don't buy
- Browse category on site, but don't buy (registered customer)
- Search for product on site, but don't buy (registered customer)
- Customer retention and growth
- Anniversary emails – of registration or first purchase
- Customer-birthday emails
- Reactivation emails (either on indication of predicted inactivity or when inactive)
- Pre-renewal emails for annual subscription services

4.

Test and refine event-triggered email programme. Important elements of tests for event-triggered emails include:

Timing – the interval after an event

Subject line, pre-header and main headline testing

Offer and proposition testing including number of offers, simplicity of offers

Copy, especially the presence or absence of recognition of previous activity

Creative layout

5. Removing addresses from broadcast list. If all your efforts to engage a recipient fail, many companies will remove the address from the list to broadcast to. If someone hasn't opened or clicked in a year, it's unlikely they ever will. But before you remove them, it's worth sending one email explaining that you are about to stop sending emails, but with the option to continue receiving emails.

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