

2005 MDR E-Mail Marketing Campaigns

Best Practices and Tips

THE TOP FIVE THINGS TO DO TO INCREASE THE ROI OF YOUR E-MAIL CAMPAIGNS

1. Take time to plan and strategize your e-mail marketing campaigns
2. Dedicate resources to creating your messages
3. Segment, target, personalize
4. Optimize the e-mail message design
5. Design a landing page to maximize conversion

1. Take time to plan and strategize your e-mail marketing campaigns

Catalog and direct mail marketers should be careful not to shortchange their e-mail marketing planning process when they add it to their overall marketing plan. If you are trying to prove the validity of another media, such as e-mail, it really behooves you to put in some solid, up-front planning so you can effectively read your test efforts.

Make sure you have:

- A clear set of goals and objectives
- Well-defined measurement metrics
- Ability to track and read your campaign results
- Flexibility to refine and optimize your campaign while executing
- Capability to compare results to those of the traditional media

2. Dedicate resources to creating your messages

Don't let the copy, artwork, and the presentation of your e-mail campaign be an afterthought—plan your marketing! You should tie your campaign themes and messages across channels, but don't rely on repurposing creatives from other mediums in your e-mail marketing. While the core message may be the same, the way it's presented in an e-mail versus a print piece is very

different. You should take the time to design both independently to achieve their respected results. Also spend the resources and effort on the landing pages associated with the e-mail campaign. Don't simply drop your reader off at your home page or on product detail that doesn't focus their attention to the very targeted message of your e-mail. A dedicated, well-designed landing page is just as critical to your overall conversion as the other aspects of your message.

3. Segment, target, personalize

At the very heart of effective e-mail marketing campaigns, especially those designed for B2B, is careful segmentation and targeting of offers. Direct mail marketers have long embraced this as a way to determine unprofitable segments in order to decrease their mailings, thus cutting costs and increasing overall ROI. While touch for touch, e-mail still has a much lower cost associated than direct mail or phone.* Responsible and effective e-mail marketing demands the same disciplined approach.

Start with your own customers and build an in-house e-mail list by collecting e-mails on your site and by appending e-mails to your customer file. Then target prospect schools in districts where their schools have purchased your product or service. Finally, profile your customers and reach prospects that look like your customers. Within these groups, segment by job function or interest and tailor your campaign specifically to this segment by offering a solution or value-based message that exclusively addresses the wants or needs of this group. Creating a valuable, relevant message for a targeted group personalizes the e-mail, offering something in which the reader will be personally interested and, therefore, much more likely to open, read, and respond to.

*Average cost per message for telemarketing is \$1 to \$3; direct mail, \$.75 to \$2; and e-mail, \$.20 to \$.40.

4. Optimize the e-mail message design

Design your e-mail creative from the ground up—do not rely on a graphic-centric presentation to convey your message. All graphical messages can be problematic with spam filters and readers with automatic graphic downloading turned off.

Design to get opened! Keep your value proposition brief and to the point. Place it at the top of the message in text so that readers who are scanning the message or those who are using Microsoft Outlook's preview pane can quickly get to it and prompt them to read further. Lead in to your value proposition with your "Subject" and "From" lines.

Communicate your message efficiently and clearly. As early as possible in your e-mail, offer a link and a call to action to your Web site to reinforce the objective of the campaign.

5. Design a landing page to maximize conversion

One of the most effective but often overlooked portions of an e-mail marketing campaign is what happens when after the customer or prospect opens the e-mail, reads it, and clicks through to your Web site. Studies have shown that a carefully crafted landing page and Web site experience dedicated specifically to this action can dramatically increase response rates. Some general guidelines are:

- Continue with the same concise value proposition that leads them to click through in the first place. Strengthen it and then offer the call to action.
- Keep the landing page focused and uncluttered.
- Strip away any unnecessary navigation or informational links—do not distract or take attention away from the primary purpose of your e-mail. (This includes site navigation bars and menus.) In addition, offer a limited number of choices: the promotion or an exit.



- Make sure you can follow incoming traffic from the e-mail campaign all the way through conversion (order, sign up, etc.). If you can track unique links from your e-mail, all the better.

Taking the time to think about your e-mail marketing campaign from start to finish and putting proper resources toward the creation of your message and landing page will pay huge dividends to the bottom-line results of your e-marketing programs.

YOUR MESSAGE CONTENT AND BEYOND

The "From" field. This is used to identify a person initiating the message. According to the CAN-SPAM Act, which took effect on January 1, 2004, the "From" line must accurately identify the message initiator. Using materially false or misleading names are clearly illegal. Beyond that requirement, the "From" line can be used to help get your e-mail opened if used to communicate your value proposition. For example, instead of using "XYZ Company" when mailing to reading teachers, consider using "Reading Solutions From XYZ Company."

The "Subject" line. Keep it brief. Some e-mail readers will not display more than 35 characters. Also, make it meaningful, benefit-oriented, and eye-catching to your audience. You may even consider identifying your company in this area as well. Avoid using popular spam terms and symbols, such as dollar signs (\$); ALL CAPS; exclamation points (!); and the words "make money," "important message," "win," and "free." Test subject lines to determine the best-performing one prior to conducting the rollout of a campaign.

The "To" line. Personalize this with a name if possible, and at minimum, use the individual's job function such as "First Grade Teacher" as opposed to a general salutation. MDR's E-Marketing Solutions easily allows for such customization and provides all the job function and teacher name data needed to completely personalize campaign addressing.

Message size. The rule of thumb is to keep it short with approximately 500 words for customer messages and 250 to 500 words for messages to prospects. Roughly, a screen full of information (no scrolling) is ideal, and paragraphs should have only 3 to 4 lines total. If you need to say more, include a link to your Web site as well as copy that entices the reader to click on that link. Test the number of links you have in your e-mail messages as some promotions lend themselves to more links than others. Generally, you should keep your text message below 10KB and your HTML message below 20KB. Avoid using a lot of text-based symbols, such as TM and ®, as they may not be readable by all e-mail systems.

Tips for HTML messages. Avoid using any embedded scripting languages, such as Java, as this can lead to deliverability problems. Due to the use of scripts from viruses and other malicious e-mails, most servers will stop e-mails with script elements in them. At best, they will strip the script out; at worst, they will simply not deliver the e-mail.

The publishing industry has been moving to implement Digital Object Identifiers or DOIs. While these may be very effective for identifying content objects on the Web because they utilize scripting, they are also problematic in e-mail marketing messages for the same reason stated above.

Designing to survive turned-off images. Over the past year or so, e-mail marketers have noticed a drop in open rates. This was not due to fewer people opening their e-mails but to the increased use of e-mail services and e-mail programs (specifically, Microsoft Outlook 2003) that turn off the downloading of graphics in HTML e-mails by default. This has not only caused concern for the open rate measurement (HTML “opens” are recorded when a small tracking image is downloaded when the e-mail is read), but because it can dramatically alter your HTML e-mail messages if numerous images are used. In order to address this issue, you should design HTML creatives that do not rely on images in order to get the message across effectively. Use text, tables, colors, and other HTML features that still are able to be viewed when images are left out. With a little design massaging, you can create a very effective HTML e-mail



message that looks and works just as good with the images turned off as with them turned on. For more detail on this topic, refer to an article that appeared in MDR's [Successful School Marketer](#).

Develop a multi-channel marketing strategy utilizing e-mail. The virtues of a synchronized direct mail/e-mail campaign approach are being extolled every day by marketers across the board, and the success rates are well documented. Results can vary, but a review of recent test cases with leading consumer marketers have shown response rates from 7% to 9% for a

follow-up campaign versus the 1% to 2% with a standard, single-message campaign. MDR's DM-Optimizer is a low-cost, effective way to achieve the benefits of multi-channel marketing. To learn more on how a multi-channel approach can benefit your marketing program, [click here](#) to view some case studies.

Include a call to action. Use multiple clickable URL links within the message to drive your audience to a landing page or particular page on your Web site. You need to tell readers exactly what you want them to do: Should they sign up for a newsletter or a free trial offer? Minimize the number of clicks it takes to respond with a purchase or feedback or to find additional related information. When setting up links, don't just send people to your home page; create a customized landing page within your current site that is relevant to your message. This will lessen potential confusion and frustration.

Use an HTML editor program versus a word processor. Work with a product specifically designed to create e-mail from the ground up, such as Microsoft FrontPage or Macromedia DreamWeaver. By doing so, you'll avoid problems such as troublesome and ill-formatted output that a traditional word processor may generate since the actual code it produces when it's saved to HTML is not 100% compatible with all Web browsers or e-mail deployment systems.

Test the message. Test your message internally; click on every link to ensure it is working properly. Have fresh eyes proofread the copy. Once the message passes the test to internal users, test it with a small subset of your customer

base, if possible. When sending the final message, include a good number of trackable seeds (approximately 10 to 20) in order to thoroughly check how well the message is getting through.

Schedule the delivery of your message.

In the education market, MDR has seen mid-week become the most popular time with 35% of all messages sent on Wednesdays. This is closely followed by Tuesdays with 29%. Click-to rates are also highest for messages sent on Wednesdays (9% as compared with the average of 7%). Interestingly, Mondays and Fridays have enjoyed some of the highest open rates (tracked on HTML messages only). Consider testing the day you send your message and don't rule out Mondays and Fridays. Testing the time of day your message is sent may also be fruitful. Some marketers report that messages sent during the day produce better results than those sent after-hours.

Make sure all departments in your company that are likely to be affected by the e-mail campaign have been notified that the message is ready to go. These might include sales, customer service, order fulfillment, and the Webmaster. Once the message is delivered, you should be prepared to monitor responses in a timely manner. Everything from opt-outs to click-to URLs and attachments pulled should be tracked. MDR provides you with early campaign results 2 to 3 days after your **E@quire** or **E@ppend** message is deployed. Final results are provided to you approximately 10 days after the message is sent so that you have comprehensive campaign results quickly.

“WHAT TO EXPECT” GUIDELINES

Responses to your message. Once the message content has been developed, it's important to consider your response plans. In the consumer market, 80% of responses are typically received within 48 hours of a message being sent. Often there is a deluge within the hour. Response times may prove longer in the education market. Answering these questions will help you determine your company's response readiness:



If you included clickable URLs within a message, is your Web server ready for the increased traffic? MDR has seen an average click-through rate of about 7%, so you need to make sure well in advance that your server can handle extra activity in a condensed period of time.

Are you equipped to fulfill a flurry of Web purchases? Again, making sure you are geared up ahead of time to respond to requests to purchase your product or service is imperative.

Have you developed a process for handling responses quickly? Online customers have come to expect timely confirmations of purchases, subscribes, unsubscribes, changes in personal data, service requests, etc. Confirmations demonstrate your company's responsiveness. You need to be prepared to deal with reply messages that request you to unsubscribe the recipient in cases where they do not follow the specified opt-out procedures. Be sure to have the staff and system in place to respond to all types of inquiries immediately.

Build long-term relationships. Ask educators what they think. Market research can be conducted quickly and cost-effectively using e-mail. Extend special offers when appropriate, but do not always rely on them. Your customers and prospects will become conditioned to expect special deals and may begin to wait for them before buying. The reality is: Consumers, including educators, do not care about most of the things you sell. They only care about their needs and the things they are in the market to buy—and they do not always make it clear what these are! It is important to sell the benefits of your product in the e-mail message. Your job is not to sell your product to everyone. Focus your energy and resources on those most likely to respond to you via e-mail. If you place your customers and confirmed opt-in prospects first, you will ensure that they receive only valuable information and offers via e-mail, keeping the channel open for ongoing communication.

All of MDR's E-Marketing Solutions are fully compliant with the CAN-SPAM Act. For complete information on CAN-SPAM, [click here](#).

Market Data Retrieval

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