Creating Measurable Success –
Business-to-Business E-Marketing

When determining the most effective marketing mix, e-mail marketing as an inexpensive yet highly powerful vehicle is a critical part of a strategic B2B marketing plan. In order to maximize success, you need to engage your creative team to design compelling messages, and then utilize best practices when conducting your campaign. In addition, marketers need to be fully aware of the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003 and the requirements within the Act that govern all e-marketing campaigns.

The Creative Overview:

The first thing you have to do in creating an e-marketing campaign is to generate the Creative Overview. Make sure that you pull from past experiences with historical campaigns to build on successes and avoid bad ideas. To do this, it is helpful to answer the following questions:

How do you get the user to open the e-mail? Really think about the subject field. While a very short line of copy, it must stand out from all other subject lines and provide a clear connection to the importance of the key marketing message. It is your subject line that might make the difference between a reader hitting "Delete" or opening and reading that e-mail.

What is compelling about the Sender field? If you or a particular sales person has a standing relationship with the client, and you can specify that name in the sender field, it will more likely get opened. Find out if you have the capability to customize this field, and if so, take advantage of those good client relationships.

What do your lead-off sentences say? Try to sum up the entire message in a few, short but *gripping* lines. Clearly highlight the key premise of your message and make these sentences as compelling as possible.

How about the timing factor? Attempt to convey a sense of urgency or immediacy. Include a compelling offer – or call to action. For example, give the first 50 responders a free CD, hold a daily drawing for a PDA, offer a web-cast or white paper that can be only be downloaded for a limited period of time. Make the person feel as though if they don't act *now*, they'll miss out on something special.

Does your e-mail campaign compliment your other current marketing efforts? Make an effort to weave all similar messages together – for example other direct mail pieces, advertisements on websites, etc.– that are relevant to your e-mail campaign. This is also a good way to effectively build your brand.

What's your message flow? Is there a good flow to the message, and if you take your recipients to another site (i.e., "click on this link to download now"), where do they land? Ensure that your flow makes sense and any links within your e-mail message are thought through completely so that readers don't land on irrelevant web pages or get distracted from your message or call to action.

How can you personalize your e-marketing message as much as possible? Research has found that the more you personalize your message, the greater your response rate will be. Even if you only know one seemingly unimportant fact about your target audience, perhaps that they are interested in one of your other products, you can evoke a positive memory response to remind them of other high quality products that they have already purchased from you. An example of this is "We hope you are enjoying the software you just purchased from us . . ."

Team Involvement

Now that your creative overview is developed, hold a kick-off meeting with all key stakeholders who will be important to the e-marketing effort. Key participants could include the copywriter, the branding specialist, marketing database personnel, key sales personnel and the decision maker who will sign off on the process. Gaining buy-in up front will not only increase the effectiveness of your e-marketing effort, it will allow the project to sail through smoothly and increase the ability to measure and track the responses.

Leverage Each Piece of e-mail "Real Estate"

Before you are ready to deploy the e-marketing campaign, review each field in the e-mail message. Ask yourself if you are truly getting the most "punch" out of every space.

Review the sender line: Is your brand or a key executive or salesperson prominently included?

Look at the subject line: Would you be inclined to open up the message if you saw it in your e-mail box? You may want to rewrite this line in a few different ways and see which one is most compelling to you. You may also want to test several different versions – even if it's just an internal test – to see which version proves to be the most convincing.

Call out your benefits: Does your e-mail have a call-out box that quickly summarizes the salient points or benefits? Are there multiple ways (including a link to your web-site) to get the message across or receive more information about what you're offering?

Spreading the word: Use a forwarding link (e-mail-a-colleague) to increase effectiveness in spreading the word about your business. Most importantly, it gets your clients to pass on the e-mail to other potential buyers. In addition, research has shown that people like to provide colleagues with good information – it makes them feel smart and helpful. Moreover, if you cleverly tie this to a form on your web-site, you can efficiently collect information on potential new prospects for future campaigns.

The Offer: Make sure that your offer is very compelling, easy-to-act-upon and prominently displayed within the text, call-out boxes, and even in sidebars. Your offer can be as simple as a "free consultation" or "free white paper" or a drawing for a demo CD. Try to motivate the client by giving a discount or a free demo – thus engaging with the client to get them to take the next step.

Establish a sense of urgency: Make sure that the copy in your message is easy to read, personal, and important. Try to evoke that sense of urgency. Write your message as if you were writing to a colleague. Use testimonials of other clients who have responded to you and have been satisfied with your product or service. Better yet, provide supporting data in the form of research that proves your value.

Format: In B2B, letters are by far the most read format. They are particularly effective with high ticket items or where you may need clear explanations. Ads or short copy works best for lead generation or selling a specific product. Newsletters are excellent tools for building client relationships, as well as for turning prospects into clients. Finally, the use of Interviews is an effective way to capture your reader's interest. Interviews have been shown to be highly effective in gaining C-level interest as well. Executives are interested in seeing what experts in the field are saying about topics of interest to them.

Best Practices

Some of the simplest best practices for effective e-marketing campaigns are the most effective and include:

The use of templates (for formatting): Using templates can create familiarity and can save you time and money. Templates can also very effectively emphasize and solidify your branding efforts in the mind of the client. Just ensure that you change formats or colors over time so that readers don't get bored. In other words, find ways to keep your e-marketing pieces fresh and appealing even when using a template.

The use of personalization: Using personalization is a *proven* best practice. Research has shown that if you use several data points of personalization (4-6), you can double your response rate. Business people tend to respond well when they feel as though the message is specific to them – particularly when it's delivered in a professional manner.

The use of your web-site: Driving traffic to your web-site gets your clients or prospects to learn more about what you do and have to offer. It goes a long way increasing more familiarity and (as discussed before) really helps to build your brand. It also can help you with your efforts to create a solid interactive marketing approach for your company. However, use some care linking from your e-marketing message to your web-site. Ensure that you direct clients to a specific place on your web-site that directly relates to your e-mail message. You don't want to confuse them by taking them to non-relevant pages or draw their attention away from the call-to-action. If you ask them to fill in a form for more information, try to pre-populate as much as possible for them to ensure a streamlined experience.

Unsubscribe Button: Finally, make certain that your unsubscribe button is prominently displayed so that those who don't want to receive these messages from you can tell you that easily. We'll get more into depth about this in our discussion on the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003.

Measuring the Success of your E-Marketing Efforts

As with any marketing effort, making certain that you are able to measure your campaign success is extremely important. There are some simple best practices to utilize to ensure that your e-marketing campaign can be easily tracked and measured so that you can learn and improve in your efforts over time.

Promo Codes/ Tracking Codes: One easy way that many companies utilize is the use of promo codes or some type of tracking number in order to measure or track response rates. These numeric tracking tools make it easy if you have several sales channels that will be following up with the targeted clients. If a client responds to their assigned sales representative or calls in to an inbound call center, they can simply give the representative the code and the representative can populate the order form/sales database/etc. This way, even if the client doesn't reply to the actual e-marketing message, you are capturing the response that the message generated.

"Contact Us" Form: The use of the "contact us" functionality on your web-site is extremely useful for tracking client responses (again, using some sort of promo code on the form – perhaps in a drop down box). It is also a good way to build your customer or prospect database for future marketing campaigns. In addition, to reiterate, it is extremely beneficial to your business to introduce your website to your clients or prospects. Your website acts as another sales channel for you and is an excellent way to build your brand.

Other Sales Channel Tracking: As discussed above, clients may contact their assigned sales representative or call into an inbound sales center. Since you were able to gain the buy-in of the sales force at the kick-off meeting (see Team Involvement), sales should be fully aware and expectant of all e-marketing campaign inquiries and leads that come to them. In addition, they should understand the importance of effectively capturing the promo codes, tracking numbers or campaign data within their ordering process for effective campaign measurement. At the onset of the campaign, you may want to provide training to the sales channels to ensure that each representative clearly understands the importance of campaign tracking. Sales incentives or contests work well to promote the desired behavior – marketing may want to sponsor a sales contest for better results.

Effective Data and Database Management Tools: In order to effectively track and measure your marketing efforts, you must be able to efficiently capture and integrate data in your customer or prospect database. This will help ensure customer satisfaction and effective follow up in future campaigns – for both marketing and sales efforts. It is very important to possess the proper database and data management tools. *(For more on this topic, please see our White Paper on Achieving CRM Success through Data Quality).*

Response Reporting Tools: Finally, if you conduct your e-marketing campaigns in-house, ensure that your e-marketing platform has a robust response reporting tool for measuring campaign effectiveness. If you outsource this work, ensure that your vendor provides you with detailed response analysis . . . and measure them on this. It is very important to your future marketing efforts.

The Legal Requirements: CAN-SPAM Act of 2003

Now that we've discussed what makes an e-marketing campaign successful, let's visit the world of compliance.

You are probably aware of the direct marketing legislation that has come into play in the last decade. The CAN-SPAM Act of 2003 was put into place primarily to combat those illegal Spammers who clog up our email boxes on a daily basis. However, you ***may not*** be aware of the fact that this sort of Spam cost the US economy over $10 billion in 2003 – and $4 billion of that was in lost productivity. Hence, the Act was created.

Spam is defined as fraudulent, unwanted and misleading email. The CAN-SPAM Act stands for Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography And Marketing Act.

Obviously, this Act was not put into place to punish those of us who are trying to promote our businesses through effective, legal and ethical marketing techniques. Therefore, as a marketer, you simply need to be aware of the requirements so that you can help protect your business from the severe fines associated with non-compliance with this Act. This is an important point because violations of this Act range from imprisonment (between one and five years), damages of up to $2 million, and statutory fines of $250 per e-mail message sent. Therefore, understanding the requirements is essential.

The Seven Requirements of the CAN- SPAM Act

1. There must be a clear and conspicuous remove function available to the recipient for 30 days after the email was sent. This is also known as an "Opt Out" function. You want to ensure that you've given your client the option of receiving or choosing not to receive emails from you.

2. You'll need to develop and enforce an unsubscribe or opt out process. This will have to be accomplished both technically, as well as within your e-mail marketing pieces. You'll need to check to ensure that you are technically prepared to manage and maintain customer "opt-out" suppression lists. And you'll need to ensure that you have the ability to communicate back to the client in the required timeframes that you've received their requests and will place them on your suppression list so that they no longer receive correspondence with you.

3. You must be able to implement opt-out requests within 10 business days. Opt-outs must be communicated to all customer contact points within your company, added to your suppression lists, and communicated back to the client within this 10 business day requirement.

4. You must be able to provide a valid physical postal address of the sender so that potential clients or prospects can mail you their request for opting out. The law requires just a postal address. However, it is important to note that the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) requires a physical address, i.e. cannot be a PO Box.

5. The CAN-SPAM Act requires that you clearly "label" your email as an advertisement. This is not required for those who have already opted in to receive information from your company. This requirement is for those non-opted-in clients and for all prospect emailing campaigns. Note: Use the "reasonable-ness" test here . . . in other words, would the average person consider this e-mail to be an advertisement? If so, you're probably fine. There is no hard law that you have to actually use the word "advertisement" in your subject line.

6. You must use a valid sender or header information. We've all received those illegal messages from Spammers and seen the creative ways that they've tried to combat Spam programs by using words in the sender and subject lines that have nothing to do with the "weight loss" or "body part enhancement" message that the e-mail contains. The CAN-SPAM Act requires that both of these fields are not misleading or false in any way.

7. You must use valid subject information. As referenced in number 6, the Subject line must reflect the intent of the e-mail message and not be misleading in any way.

Conclusions

Remember that e-mail marketing is an extremely effective and cost efficient way to reach your clients. It can be used very successfully as part of your direct marketing strategy. By keeping the following points in mind, your e-marketing efforts should be very successful.

- To increase each campaign's effectiveness, use creativity and structure the message to each distinct audience that you are reaching. This will definitely increase your response rates.

- To increase the effectiveness of your multi-channel marketing efforts, tie your e-mail messaging to your web-site and your other marketing messaging. This will help you to create a solid impression of your company and brand in the client's mind. It will also assist in increasing the level of responsiveness for each campaign, through each of your channels.

- Make certain that each campaign is measurable and trackable. This is the only way to improve your efforts for the next campaign and ensure that your e-marketing efforts are paying off. It also helps 'sell' the next campaign internally; success breeds success.

- Finally, ensure that each person who touches your customer relationships understands the requirements around the CAN-SPAM Act and integrates Best Practices into your e-marketing campaigns to stay in compliance, avoid the risks of being out of compliance (i.e. fines and prison risk), and create satisfied customers and increased good will for your organization.