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WHAT'S WORKING IN EMAIL MARKETING?

Optimizing Content Across Devices, Increasing Personalization

INTRODUCTION

Email is a steadfast staple of B2B marketing — it retains **92% of customers** (compared to 80% for social media and 70% for search engine marketing) and serves as the most successful **lead gen channel**. In short, email marketing is a necessity for modern businesses, but it's growing more complex by the day as audiences demand more personalized, eye-catching content.

However, marketers are plagued by low open and click-through rates, a high level of unsubscribers and spam allegations. By balancing media, text and timing, modern practitioners are well equipped to craft email campaigns that simultaneously inform and persuade prospects to act.

"We need to think outside of 'selling' emails and look at inspiration, education and talk to the cohorts that get ignored but are valuable influencers," said Corinne Sklar, VP of Marketing & Communications for **IBM Consulting at IBM**. "Data shows us that people don't really read their emails — they just scan them. To promote that 'scanability,' marketers need to focus on the goal of the email, which might need to be more brand- and image-heavy versus just text."

That diversification and ease of reading is imperative, as inboxes collect upwards of 121 business emails per day. Throughout this special report, we'll discuss what's currently working in email marketing (and what's not). By blending expert commentary with real-world case studies, we'll uncover:

- The role of automated tools and technologies that help organizations send out trigger-based emails based on certain actions;
- How to break up traditionally text-heavy emails;
- The use of email across all stages of the buyer's journey, from the first personalized letter to late-stage 1:1 deliveries;
- The growing use of interactive content, such as quizzes, surveys and polls, to better engage subscribers and learn more about their interests; and
- How to ensure that emails are fully optimized for all mediums, whether it's a desktop computer or mobile device.



PERSONALIZING OUTREACH BASED ON BUYER PREFERENCES

The power of email marketing is no secret: **77% of B2B buyers** prefer to be contacted over email, and the strategy has the power to generate **3,600% ROI**. Despite putting up impressive numbers, Sklar explained that marketers are still struggling to personalize emails and instead maintaining the status quo of filling in contact information blanks in outreach.

“Personalization is more than just industry and first name — even though clients still struggle with the basics,” she continued. “Email is a healthy and valuable communication channel, but it’s not a panacea for all.”

To move beyond the infamous “Hi [Name]” emails, Courtney Beasley, Fractional CMO and Co-founder/CEO of [the cobe agency](#), added that successful personalization relies on a few fundamental principles:

1. Understanding the audience’s interests, needs and behaviors, as well as segmenting databases to ensure sending highly relevant content to different groups;
2. Creating content that provides value, solves problems and entertains, which includes using persuasive language and eye-catching visuals;
3. Analyzing past open and click-through rates to determine optimal send times that will generate the most engagement; and
4. Continuously A/B testing subject lines, content and calls to action to refine approaches as needed.

“To break up text-heavy emails, marketers can incorporate visual elements like images, videos and infographics,” said Beasley. “Additionally, using subheadings, bullet points and concise paragraphs makes content more digestible. Interactive elements, like accordions or expandable sections (via custom CSS), can also make lengthy emails more engaging.”

She concluded by explaining that she opts for email marketing platforms that support interactive elements, such as embedded surveys and polls, to encourage engagement and provide valuable insights into subscriber preferences.

Proof Point:

[Paycor](#), an HR and payroll platform, created Perspectives+, a campaign that featured an in-depth initiative to help illustrate the importance and benefits of a more diverse and inclusive workforce, while also providing the resources needed to put change into action. One of the assets utilized for this effort included a monthly email that served as a digest of the most recent content created with a linkback to the entire library. Through the email campaign, the company saw:

- Open rates of 22%;
- Click-through rates (CTR) of 4.3%; and
- Click-to-open rates (CTOR) of 20%



TAILORING SENDS ACROSS THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

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Given the importance of personalization and relevance, understanding and catering to the distinct needs and interests of potential customers at every stage of their purchasing process can make all the difference. Beasley explained that email marketing is versatile and can be applied across all stages of the buyer's journey. For example, she suggested marketers:

- Use educational content and storytelling to introduce their brand and generate initial **awareness**;
- Provide more detailed information and case studies to help prospects evaluate their offerings while they **consider** their options;
- Offer incentives, testimonials and personalized recommendations to sway **decision-making**; and
- Send **post-purchase** emails for feedback, cross-sell opportunities and to build long-term customer relationships.

From there, it's imperative that marketers align their email's formatting and messaging with the prospect's position in the journey and ensure they're addressing their specific needs and concerns. With the increased reliance on generative AI tools to craft email messaging — leveraged by **38% of marketers** — practitioners need to incorporate outside technology to ensure messaging is on target.

"Make sure you have a platform that allows for quality assurance and a process for quality control," said Sklar. "These steps can get bypassed for speed, but we all have received that incorrect personalization or 'oops' email. Do your teams a favor and implement a solid quality assurance process. As you progress in a cycle, your sales team tends to get more engaged. Working with sales to best leverage email to augment their sales process is key to buy in and continuing the conversation with the prospect and customer."

Proof Point:

A **non-profit healthcare** company teamed up with an email marketing platform to help streamline its internal review processes to ensure everything was on brand, included the correct imagery and calls-to-action and met the intended goals for the selected audience. After cutting down the days-long review process, the company was able to create two unique email campaigns and send them to nearly 3 million people in 2022, resulting in more time to focus on innovation and refining other areas of its email workflow.

"Do your teams a favor and implement a solid quality assurance process."

CORINNE SKLAR, IBM CONSULTING AT IBM



OPTIMIZING EMAIL SENDS ACROSS ALL MEDIUMS

Given people's constant consumption of digital media, they're almost always connected to their inboxes in some form, whether it's on their desktop devices or mobile phones. Being that marketers can't guarantee what platform a prospect or customer will access their email from, it's important that practitioners have all their bases covered. Beasley explained that it's "crucial" to optimize emails across mediums, and suggested practitioners:

- Use responsive email design that adapts to different screen sizes;
- Test emails on various devices and email clients to ensure compatibility;
- Keep mobile users in mind when designing layouts, ensuring readability and easy navigation on smaller screens; and
- Optimize images and media for fast loading on mobile connections.

"We utilize a comprehensive set of tools, including email automation platforms, CRM systems and analytics tools with our various clients," said Beasley. "These technologies help us manage subscriber lists, track engagement and personalize emails based on recipient behavior and preferences."

Proof Point:

7Across, a timeshare company, sends more than 3.5 million emails every month in five different languages, and uses a manual process to ensure the campaigns have the proper accessibility requirements. By partnering with an email marketing platform, the company was able to create templates to scale development and create error-free emails. After implementing the new technology, 7Across can now quickly and thoroughly test every email and collaborate more efficiently.



CONCLUSION

With personalization and optimization serving as the cornerstone of email marketing, brands are forging deeper connections with their audience by addressing their individual preferences and needs. Moreover, automation tools have revolutionized the way emails are delivered, enabling timely, relevant messaging without overwhelming marketing teams while optimizing content across platforms.

By continually refining these approaches and staying attuned to emerging trends, businesses can harness the power of email marketing to drive engagement, conversions and, ultimately, long-term brand loyalty. As the digital landscape evolves, the adaptability to integrate these strategies seamlessly will undoubtedly continue to shape the future of email marketing.

"Marketing will always be about standing out — we sometimes think that just following best practices will improve our marketing," said Sklar. "But best practices only work to get to parity; innovation and engagement will always be about the new ways you engage with prospects, so experiment often and don't be afraid to fail."



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