

Key Email Strategic Considerations for 2010

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The beginning of the year gives email marketers an opportunity to refocus on their program's mission and goals, and, just as importantly, the subscriber experience. With that in mind, we encourage marketers to take some time to think about their overall email strategy, approaching it from both the business side as well as the subscriber side. The following are all key strategic considerations for program optimization.

Create a mission statement to guide your strategy and approach. For too many marketers, the email strategy is something along the lines of "We send out emails to drive revenue or brand awareness," with limited thought given to what they are really trying to achieve. We encourage our clients to think back to their Business 101 courses in college and define a mission statement for their email program in order to define the program's purpose, provide direction, and guide decisions and actions. For one client recently, the mission statement became: "Our email program will provide a relevant, timely, and well-structured email communications experience which delivers our users needed and desired information in order to increase their affinity with us." In this case, the focus was on giving the subscribers an integrated experience rather than just disparate messages. This notion of a communications experience then translated directly to a vision for the program's structure.

Establish achievable, measurable goals and objectives for the email program. Everyone has high level goals for their program, but in many cases, those goals remain at that level, rather than being discreetly defined and measured against. So we still see lots of "the goal of our email program is to drive revenue," but not nearly enough of "the goal of our email program is to drive a 10% Y/Y increase in revenue." Marketers should be more aggressive in setting goals that they can measure performance against.

Define value for the customers. The email program must also bring value to its subscribers, which can be tricky to define accurately. Marketers should first identify the different ways in which their customers perceive value as it relates to their business, and identify email programs and campaigns that meet those needs, as well as business needs. Knowing and addressing these value considerations is a key step in increasing relevance and, ultimately, response. Some customer value areas to consider include:

- Relevance - The messaging or offer matters to me and makes sense based on who I am
- Timeliness - I got something when I needed/wanted it
- Exclusivity - I'm part of a special group
- Financial - It saves or makes me money
- Temporal - It saves me time
- Customer Voice - They want and value my opinion and feedback. They care about what I say

- Peer Consideration - It makes me look good to people I care about

Align email programs with lifecycle phases. We often find that when email marketers plot their various programs on a customer lifecycle map (e.g. acquisition, conversion, growth, retention, reactivation or similar), they tend to skew heavily towards one or two phases (usually retention) and have gaps in other key areas (usually acquisition and reactivation). And in many cases, marketers don't even look at the phase of the customer lifecycle that a program addresses, or even consider this notion when defining programs. Most marketers would benefit from this sort of visual mapping exercise because it will become immediately obvious where there are missed opportunities. This, in addition to understanding how customers define value, can help generate relevant email programs which address the needs of both marketer and subscriber.

It's easy to get mired in the day-to-day tactical elements of email programs, but taking some time to step back and consider these strategic aspects is critical. And there's no better time to do it than at the dawn of a new year.