SPECIAL REPORT:

INBOX CONFIDENTIAL

THE SECRETS YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR EFFECTIVE EMAIL MARKETING

BY BETH NEGUS VIVEIROS

For most marketers, email remains an essential part of their integrated communications plan. But while email is a relatively inexpensive channel, deliverability issues, the plethora of data elements to consider and the numerous devices consumers now use to read (and let's face it, screen) their messages make it more challenging than ever to execute successfully. In this special report, Chief Marketer looks at the elements of email you need to consider to engage consumers in the inbox in 2014.

DELIVERABILITY & EMAIL ENGAGEMENT

The Gmail tabbed inbox hasn't caused as much of a deliverability crisis as many marketers anticipated. But email marketers must still take care to keep users engaged, as ISPs are still rating incoming messages based on users' engagement.

"The tabbed inbox was a big media moment, but it didn't turn out to be the apocalypse everyone thought it would be," says Dave Walters, product evangelist at Silverpop. "If you're a top brand, customers will look for you and elevate you to their primary inbox. For people who are doing things

READ ALL ABOUT IT

ENEWSLETTERS OUTPERFORM B2B PROMOTIONAL EMAILS: STUDY

B2B enewsletters outperformed promotional emails in both unique open and clicks in a recent study from Experian.

"Newsletters are filling a need—in a B2B market, you really want an informed customer, because you're generally not talking about products that are an impulse buy," says Shelley Kessler, manager, reporting and analytics, cross-channel marketing, Experian Marketing Services.

Experian looked at more than 400 brands in its analysis, and found that over half of its B2B clients are sending out enewsletters. In comparison, only 6% of its multichannel retail clients mail newsletters. "It speaks to the kind of products that are being sold," notes Kessler.

Enewsletters generated 21.1% unique opens and 4.5% unique clicks, compared to 16.3% and 2.8%, respectively, for promotional emails.

Webinars and forums had the highest unique open and click rates for emails promoting B2B events. B2B marketers should be using emails to connect with attendees both before and after the event to reinforce the relationship. Unique open rates for the average webinar email were 20% for invitations and 26% for reminders, leaping to 36% post webinar.

The study also showed that while mobile does matter in B2B, the majority of B2B emails are still being read most thoroughly on desktops. More than 27% of the B2B emails studied were opened on mobile devices, but 92% of clicks still occur on desktops.

Blurred Lines

Overall, B2C and B2B marketers are taking pages from each other's playbooks. While B2C marketers are showing increased interest in lead scoring, B2B marketers are focusing more on creative, offer and responsive design.

"They're really considering how to get the customer to convert via email, versus just warming them up before they're pitched over to a salesperson," says Dave Walters, product evangelist for Silverpop.—*BNV*

right, the Gmail changes won't crush them."

But what *is* more of a crisis is the issue of list quality and dealing with inactive users, says Matt Highsmith, founder/CEO of TailoredMail.

By continuing to mail to inactives, you are slowly killing the success of your email campaign, he notes, suggesting that marketers should syphon off inactives and put them into different broadcast patterns. Look at doing separate mailings to these folks on a semi-monthly or even quarterly basis. Take them out of our core broadcast and create a second IP address to send those people through, so you're not inadvertently reducing the reputation of the "from" address that you use for your really active people. "If you don't, you're just shooting yourself in the foot," Highsmith says.

"Engagement metrics matter and having a third or a half of your list being inactive for six months or a year is a recipe for disaster," says Chad White, principal of marketing research, ExactTarget. "People don't realize they have a problem until it's too late."

"If someone hasn't opened your emails in six months, do you need to send them five emails per week?" says Andrew King, senior strategy consultant, Lyris. "You want to get into their inbox rather than the junk folder."

There's an ongoing pressure from executives to send more and more email because it is relatively inexpensive. But batch and blast campaigns can lead to reduced relevancy and list fatigue, notes Ryan Hofmann, director, retail industry solutions, Responsys.

Data acquisition should also be taken into consideration. "I always encourage clients to put email address entry into the customer's hands. Have them enter it themselves and get it right from the start," says Hofmann. "Incorrectly entered data leads to high bounce rates and can hit retailers in particular very hard."

SEGMENTATION & TRIGGER CAMPAIGNS

Also consider geographic segmentation, especially with mobile devices, Highsmith says. If 40% to 50% of your opens are coming from mobile devices, you can get a spike in opens and clickthroughs by delivering at a certain time of day in a certain time zone. Delivering at 7 a.m. in each time zone, for example, could give you a huge boost.

Also segment by the types of things users click on in your messages. For example, says Highsmith, the jeweler Ben Bridge sells items ranging from $99 pendants to high-end engagement rings in the thousands. The jeweler looks at what people have clicked on and then retargets and remails them based on that activity.

"Anybody can do this if they take the time," he says. "It will keep the list from getting tired and save you money."

White notes that ExactTarget recently did a test where it abandoned shopping carts with 100 retailers and only about 20% sent a triggered response. Those that are doing this successfully are reaching out quickly and tightening up their timing to reach people quicker before they move on to buy elsewhere.

Jeweler Ben Bridge looks at visitor activity to segment the types of products it promotes via email.

Seasonal elements can be very influential in abandoned cart programs, as well as welcome series, notes White. "Welcome people who came in at different times differently—if someone is shopping in early February in any

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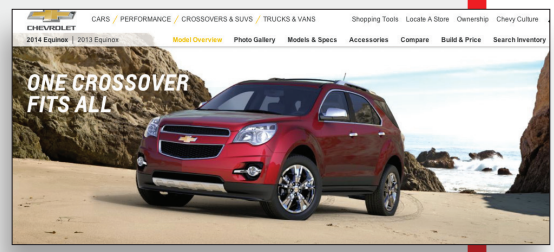
DOS AND DON'TS FOR USING VIDEO IN EMAIL

As the technology to showcase it improves, so does the use of video as an engagement device in email. Chief Marketer recently talked about dos and don'ts for using video in email with Matt Highsmith, founder/CEO of TailoredMail, which recently introduced a new video-in-email solution.

Get personal: Use an overlay on the email image to entice the recipient to play. "Do an overlay on the 'playback poster'—for example, a video highlighting a new SUV could have the tagline 'Joe, can you see yourself in a new Chevrolet Equinox?'" says Highsmith. "This will make the video more dynamic and double the chance of them watching."

Keep it short: If you want someone to watch, keep it under 60 seconds. "I'm not sure if there's some psychological reason why people bail if it goes over a minute, but under a minute seems to be the sweet spot to get people to watch the whole thing."



Go high-def: Take into consideration that a viewer might want to expand the video to full screen. Encode your video at the highest possible value available so it still looks great when they expand it.

Never set your video to autoplay: This one is basic. It annoys everyone. Don't do it.

Don't let your video overpower your message: Videos are great for engagement, but make sure that the video doesn't distract from your call to action. Make sure that your video complements—rather than competes with—the core message you want to deliver.

Give a voice to your content: If you mail enewsletters, consider doing a video for each edition of your editor giving an overview of the content and encouraging the viewer to read the articles. "It offers a human touch and brings the newsletter to life."—*BNV*

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kind of gift category, a Valentine's abandoned cart message can make a big difference."

"Incorporate all the data points you have into your campaigns to drive actions," says Margaret Farmakis, vice president of professional services, Return Path. "Don't just look at your data campaign by campaign, but rather by how it will help you engage with your subscriber over the long term."

Purchase data can be used to trigger a number of campaigns, including requests for product reviews and rankings, or offers to reorder a product that requires replenishment or may be getting discontinued, she notes.

If diving into automation seems intimidating, take baby steps. A simple welcome series is a great way to get started, says Highsmith. In the first month to six weeks that someone has joined your list, introduce them to your company by offering things like a white paper, a case study or video.

SUBJECT LINES & PREHEADERS

Mobile has influenced subject lines, naturally inspiring shorter, tighter creative. It pays to be aware of where the cutoffs are, says White, who received one recent email with the subject line "Shoes you don't want to miss." Unfortunately, on the iPhone, that was clipped to "Shoes you don't want."

Also, don't let the preheader be a wasted element, says Silverpop's Walters. "Use it to replay your call to action, don't just let it be generic."

Write your subject line and preheader text in tandem. "I advise people to use the snippet text to hit a different cord, whether it's functional or pragmatic

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RETAIL RETARGETING

Both online and brick-and-mortar retailers are increasingly using email to engage and re-engage customers at various points in their buying cycles.

Brick-and-mortar retailers are looking at the digital lifecycle and online interactions, and using email in-store, notes Ryan Hofmann, director, retail industry solutions, Responsys.

"Retailers are giving store associates tablets and smartphones to engage customers in store with browsing-related messaging," he notes. "As a retailer, if I'm smart, I'm picking up on someone browsing the shoe display in my store. If they didn't buy the shoe, I can leverage that in-store behavior to create a targeted and personalized communication."

Messaging is also becoming more targeted to retail customers' lifecycles with the brand, he says. For example, if a store wants to send a 25% offer, it can position it in different ways to connect with different segments. New customers might get an "Exclusive offer for new customers" pitch, while at risk/lapsed names would receive "Don't miss out—come back now" messaging.

"And with dormant or inactive names, remember that this is the group where you can try anything to get them to become more active—test anything here, because anything positive that happens is a win," says Hofmann. "The more you send automated lifecycle campaigns, the more you'll see how they can add value."—*BNV*

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or aspirational," he says. "If you ask a question with the subject line, maybe answer it with the preheader."

A focus on the preheader for mobile might create some redundancies for desktop readers, but it pays to be aware of what your preheader says. If you don't you could create an unintentional non sequitur. A recent email from the ASPCA, he says, had the subject line "Wish you could adopt them all?" But the preheader was information on how to unsubscribe, which was a disconnect.

"Good preheader text can make your text relevant and it can actually extend your subject line," says King. "It's really simple to do and a lot of email marketers just don't do it."

MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

ExactTarget tracks a universe of about 160 B2C brands. About 21% are using responsive design, while 9% use a mobile-aware design that is differential to smartphones. The remainder are still using desktop-centric designs. "The primary messages are mobile-friendly, but everything is email design circa 2005," says White.

"2013 was the year that responsive design took off but it will become normal in 2014," says King.

Along with responsive design, one other way mobile is influencing email is through live email content that adapts based on elements like the subscriber's location, the weather, their device or what social channels they are using.

"If you have a brick-and-mortar store, you can display a GPS map of the nearest location," says King. "There's loads of other things you could do—display live twitter feeds, adapt the products featured based on the weather."

The key to personalization is about being relevant to the person—done wrong, it can look cheap or creepy, says Bruce Ernst, vice president of product management, Montetate. "Personalization needs to go beyond saying simply saying 'Dear Bruce'—it needs to be part of a legitimate conversation or it doesn't work."

Don't use personalization as a parlor trick, he advises. Rather use it to engage the person by looking at their behavior, as well as the device they are using and their location. "You want the email to be renderable on whatever device I'm opening it on," Ernst says. "And if I'm on the move, you know you want to keep the message short."

"The reality is that everyone wants to market like Amazon, sending people emails with product recommendations that are relevant to them," says Mark Zilli, senior product marketing manager, Marketo. "It's trickling down to everybody, and just requires being thoughtful about how you take advantage of your automation platform."

"If the landing page is just another island you hop to, you've made more work for everyone and you still lose the visitor," says Monetate's Ernst. "Make sure the landing page experience is consistent with the message in the email. Things fall down when people don't have a good landing page experience."

"Marketers need to think about mobile first," says DJ Waldow, digital marketing evangelist, Marketo. "We're seeing more and more marketers adopting a mobile first attitude, with the leading edge going past responsive design and taking customers on an experience that is appropriate for their device and then integrating the campaign with other channels." !