



Whitepaper

The Perfect Fit: A Guide to Selecting your
Ideal Email Marketing Partner

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Why Email Marketing?

Email is consistently rated as the world's most popular and most widely used application on the internet and is now by far the leading means of business communication. It is second only to search in online marketing budgets with 97% of consumers and 94% of marketers using, piloting or planning email marketing programmes with 88% of people anticipating the effectiveness of email to increase in the next 3 years¹. Online marketing spending will double to €16billion by 2012 with email, search and display advertising accounting for 18% of total media budgets in Europe.² In short, promoting your organisation and its services via email is one of the most powerful, flexible and cost-efficient means of direct marketing and therefore it's imperative that when choosing an Email Service Provider (ESP) that you select the right one who will match your needs perfectly.

Permission Marketing vs. Interruption Marketing

Coined and popularised by Seth Godin, *permission marketing* is the opposite of traditional *interruption marketing* (tactics that only work if they interrupt you to get your attention). Permission marketing is about building an ongoing relationship of increasing depth with customers. Permission marketing has been hailed as a way for marketers to succeed in a world increasingly cluttered with marketing messages.

(Source: marketingterms.com)

Before embarking on your search

Before you send out a Request for Proposal (RFP) it's vital that you ask yourselves a number of questions which will help you begin your search for the perfect email marketing partner.

1. What does email marketing mean to your organisation?
2. What are you trying to achieve from your email marketing campaign (retention, loyalty, brand awareness, new leads, sales etc)?
3. How will email marketing compliment your existing marketing strategy?
4. Do you currently communicate with your clients/customers on a regular basis and if so how?
5. How many emails will you be sending each year and how often?
6. Are you looking for different email designs for each send-out or one consistent template?
7. Who from your organisation needs to be involved in the decision-making process (IT, legal etc)

¹ "Trends: Email Marketing Comes of Age", Shar VanBoskirk, Forrester Research (2nd March 1997)

² "European online marketing tops Eur16 Billion in 2012", Rebecca Jennings, Forrester Research (12th July 2007)

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8. Who will be using the system within your organisation?
9. What budget do you have?
10. When are you hoping to launch the programme?
11. Where will you be getting the email addresses and permissions from, e.g. own customers, address generation campaigns, website?

Once you've approached each of these questions you will be in a much better position to embark on your search for the perfect email marketing partner.

Beginning the Search

Now that you have outlined your email marketing strategy by answering these key questions you are now at the position where you can begin your search for the perfect email marketing partner. ESP's come in all shapes and sizes so before making any decisions it would be fruitful to work out exactly what type of organisation would suit you and your company best in terms of their shape, size, longevity, range of services and market placement. Therefore we've put together a few ideas of things you may wish to consider:

Your ESP – The Company Background

- **Global or local?** What is their market presence? Are you looking for an ESP who is purely based in the UK or who has a wide range of experience in other markets and languages across other countries?
- **Experience:** Are you looking for a long established ESP with a number of years experience behind them or a newcomer onto the scene?
- **Financial Stability:** What is the annual, revenue, turnover, cash flow and growth potential of the ESP?
- **Internal Resources:** How many members of staff do they employ nationally/internationally and how many account managers and project managers are on hand? What is the strength of the management team? Will you have a named contact as support or simply a general helpdesk contact?
- **Credibility:** How diverse is the ESP's client base? How many UK clients do they have? Is there a wide range of markets and sizes of companies covered? Do they have a case study, reference or testimonial of a similar organisation to yours to support them?

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- **Specialists:** Are specific vertical markets targeted? What industry-specific resources, services, expertise and/or client base does the company offer to this industry? And how does the organisation and their platform specifically support those industries?
- **Staff:** What is the size and experience of the team you'll be working with? How many clients do they already handle and how will your organisation fit into their existing workload?
- **Partnership Capabilities:** Will your ESP work well with your other marketing agencies and partners?
- **Range of Services Offered:** Are they an end-to-end supplier with a wide range of products and services at your disposal or do they specialise in one area of digital direct marketing?
- **Associations:** Is the ESP a member of any trade associations or governing bodies, e.g. the Direct Marketing Association (DMA)?
- **Customer Services:** When and how can you contact your ESP, what is their response time and how knowledgeable are the support staff?
- **Future Commitment:** What is the management team's vision for the future of email services and long-term growth of the company?
- **USP's:** What differentiates this ESP from their competitors and how relevant are these USP's to your needs?

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What are the Different Types of ESP's?

If you're new to email marketing then embarking on your research can seem extremely daunting as initially there appears to be lots of organisations to choose from. One of the fundamental decisions you need to make is whether to outsource your email marketing or keep it in-house, and making this decision could have far-reaching consequences. There are a number of ESP's on the market who provide a wide range of products, services and functionalities, so it's imperative to understand the different types of ESP's and their different areas of focus. To make things easier for you, we have analysed the market and segmented it into four key categories as the following diagram shows:

	Managed	ASP	Software License	DIY
Features	Every wish can be fulfilled	Full set of features	Most features included	Free choice of features
Deliverability	Deliverability managed (e.g. ISP relations, spam check)	Deliverability managed (e.g. ISP relations, spam check)	No management of deliverability	No management of deliverability
Investment	No investment of hardware, software, bandwidth, system administration needed	No investment of hardware, software, bandwidth, system administration needed	Deployment of availability of system administration	Deployment of availability of system administration
Quality Assurance	24/7 availability	24/7 availability	No external quality assurance	No external quality assurance
Internal Effort	Virtually none	Minimal	More time-consuming	Extremely time-consuming
Internal Skills	No know-how needed	No know-how needed	Some know-how beneficial	Internal experts required
Support	Full support	Full support	Limited support	None except internal
Long-term cost implications	Moderate	Low	Moderate to high	Substantial
Internal Labour Costs	Virtually nothing	Minimal	Moderate to high	Substantial
DMA Compliance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Client responsibility
Scaleability	100% scaleable	100% scaleable	Scaleable once hardware in place	Unknown quantity
Best Practice	Best practice consultancy	Best practice advice	Best practice advice	No benchmarking

←
Degree of outsourcing
→

High
Low

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Whilst each option has its merits, for the majority of organisations an outsourced solution – whether a fully managed or ASP (Application Service Provider) solution – can be the most sensible option. ASP solutions are always up to date concerning any email marketing legalities and you automatically benefit from any system upgrades and new versions. Outsourcing will allow you to concentrate on your marketing strategy, letting your ESP take away some of the workload from you.

Solutions and Services Offered by ESP's

Now you have seen a snapshot of the four different segments of the email market (Managed, ASP, Software License and In-House as seen on page 5) you are now in a better position to take a look at the different solutions and services that each sector and ESP offer. These vary considerably from supplier to supplier so as always you need to make a hotlist of the most important services and solutions you are looking for. To point you in the right direction, take a look at the following guidelines, taking note of the solutions and services mentioned below which you feel are relevant to your organisation:

- **Types of solution offered:** Look at whether the ESP offers one product or a range of services such as end-to-end services, a technology, media campaigns, lead generation campaigns and market research.
- **Types of services offered:** What types of services does the ESP offer. These can vary massively and can include some of the following: List provision; data management; data cleansing; best practice consultancy; broadcast, personalisation and segmentation; real-time reporting; full campaign management; creative design and copywriting services; dynamic content solutions; hosting services; event triggered messaging and sequence messaging; integration with web analytics; if multi-country/language campaigns can ESP support this – and so on!!
- **Email Deliverability:** Does the ESP have an ongoing commitment to deliverability? How do they ensure that they don't appear on blacklists and do they have a relationship with all the major ISP's for white listing? Do they have a dedicated deliverability team?
- **Product Features:** What features are important to you? E.g. rich media content capability, videomail, audio, integration, multi-channel capabilities, split testing, digital signatures to avoid phishing emails, management structure within the system, email receipts on online transactions etc. Build a list of all ESP's who have these features as part of their solutions to aid your decision-making process.
- **Product Flexibility:** Can the ESP be your partner today and in the future providing you with advice on market trends and new product capabilities?
- **Functionality:** How comprehensive is the ESP's functionality for planning, designing, executing and measuring email campaigns, compliance functionality.

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- **Technology Platform:** How easy to use is the technology? Can someone with no HTML training or know-how use the technology easily?
- **Reporting Capabilities:** Does the ESP provide you with reports in your desired format allowing you to measure the success of the campaign? Whether you're opting for an ASP or in-house solution you should be able to get comprehensive reports including open rates, click rates and bounces as well as advanced functionalities such as complex real time reports and the ability to link revenues generated from a specific campaign to individual email addresses etc.
- **Integration with Other Applications:** Does the ESP easily integrate with your other applications like Web Analytics, CRM, E-Commerce, ERP and databases?
- **Training:** Will the ESP provide you with full training and support on their product or service which you will be adopting?

What Now?

Now you have had the chance to do some research into the different types of ESP's on the market and the solutions and services they offer, you are now in the position where you can make an informed selection – so what do you do now?

Firstly before you start building a shortlist of ESP's to approach for a Request for Information, here are a few common misconceptions and myths for you to consider in order to aid your decision-making process:

- You do not need a dedicated IP address to send emails out safely
- You do not need a built in spam checker
- Ironport is not essential
- You may prefer to choose a UK-based ESP with key staff based in your country of origin, particularly in terms of back-office support and time differences

Here are a few final questions to consider before making your shortlist and ultimately your decision:

- **Are you switching from one ESP to another?** If so make sure you check the notice period and termination of contract.
- **Do you have management buy-in?** Ensure your management team are kept in the decision-making loop and that they are endorsing your decisions. This will save time and a lot of hassle further down the line.

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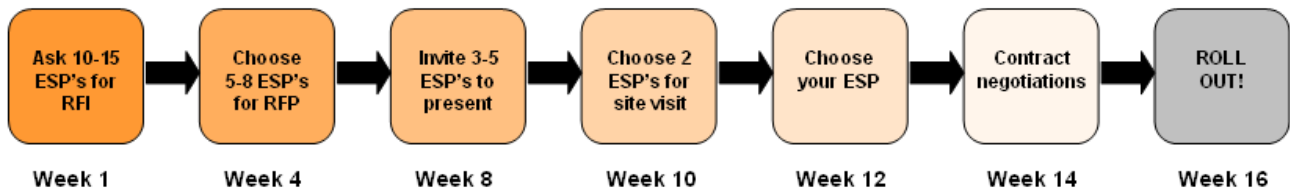
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- **Testimonials:** Ask your ESP to put you in touch with a comparable company to yours in terms of size of organisation – proven ability to work with an organisation like yours.
- **Likeability:** You will be speaking to your account manager and project manager on a regular basis so it's vital that you get on with them and you can build a mutually respectful relationship over time.
- **Membership organisations:** It's worth checking that the ESP you're choosing is a member of a trade association such as the DMA and that they adhere to best practice.

The amount of time it takes from asking 10-15 ESP's³ for a Request for Information (RFI), to choosing a shortlist of ESP's for a RFP to making your final decision and rolling out the system varies vastly from organisation to organisation. However we have tried to indicate the average decision-making process and timescale in the below workflow diagram:



GOOD LUCK!

³ "Finding an agency", Direct Marketing Association (2nd February 2004)

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About eCircle

eCircle is one of Europe's largest digital direct marketing companies, owning the most comprehensive permission marketing database for email campaigns and lead generation as well as a state-of-art technology solution for digital direct marketing. Since 1999 eCircle has stood for innovative and efficient online marketing for customer acquisition and retention. Leading organisations including Argos, HBOS and Samsung trust our consistent customer care, our long-term experience and not least our highly motivated and committed employees. The company has more than 160 employees, with headquarters in Munich and additional offices in London, Paris and Milan.

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