

## Why email and social media are joined at the hip

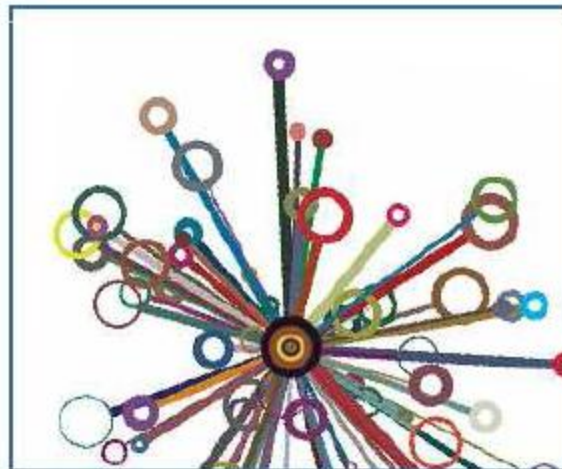
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There has been no shortage of discussion in the industry about how the emergence of social media will effect email marketing, and its use and value as a communications tool. And unsurprisingly, there has also been no shortage of people spewing doom and gloom that spend on email will suffer as a result of brands jumping on the social media band wagon. Volker Wiewer, chief executive of leading online marketing services provider at eCircle explains more.

I don't think that this could be further from the truth. Social media isn't going to take over email. In fact, email as a method of communication has benefited hugely from social media, thanks to its ability in letting consumers interact and exchange and share

information.



The rise of social media has been phenomenal, and marketers have been quick to assess how they can take advantage of this new channel. Taking stock of the new interactive world we live in, there are some equally impressive statistics giving weight to the commercial potential for social media:

- 70% of the digital universe will be generated by individuals by 2010 (Source: TechCrunch 2009)
- Facebook is now the 4th most-visited website, with more than 300 million active users of which 50% are logging in every single day.
- It's not just the under 30's who are constantly connected: 33% of 45-54 yr-olds and 23% of 55-65 yr olds are always online, a hugely lucrative demographic segment (Source: Future Laboratory + Virgin Media 2009)

- Bazaarvoice clients using Ratings & Reviews or Ask & Answer UGC products report big increases in conversion (>10% increase for top-rated products on Argos.co.uk; 40% increase for mistergooddeal.com)

That said, I don't believe social media is, or ever will be, as effective as a standalone channel. It is at its most effective when used as part of a wider marketing campaign, and it has been suggested that social media actually makes people consume email more, for example through sites like Facebook or LinkedIn which use email regularly

People make connections through social media, with other people, with brands and businesses, and then look to maintain those connections through other channels, such as email. This is where I think that email marketing and social media should be joined at the hip; it's not about abandoning one method for another, but about using the best elements of each to deliver higher ROI.

In light of this we recently launched a shiny new version of our email marketing broadcast tool eC-messenger to include new technologically advanced features, which along with the groundbreaking Text-to-Inbox tool, included the Social Media Fusion tool.

The Social Media Fusion tool allows our clients to include links to a range of social communities such as Digg, Delicious, Facebook and Stumble Upon, which increase the exposure to marketing emails as consumers forward them on to interested friends, family and colleagues. Ultimately these tools help create better integration between different online channels, in order to create a real, human, emotional connection with consumers, which is of course the first step to a serious social strategy.

To keep this interaction going, brands must encourage multi-network dialogue and multi-channel distribution of content; share website UGC with your Facebook page and encourage tweets and re-tweets to ensure the conversation doesn't fade out. In addition to this it's important to spread the word across other online/offline channels, such as feature reviews in email, brochures and in-store, also known as 'social syndication'.

Online channels, including social media, can and absolutely should work in partnership and compliment each other; it's not about bombarding the consumer from all angles, more about capturing their hearts, engaging their minds, and then the wallets will naturally follow.

Instead of focusing on direct returns, or putting all your eggs into one 'social media' basket, through really listening and interacting online, companies have a huge opportunity to use all the digital tools at their fingertips to create a real relationship with customers.