

How to construct your email communications using best practice

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For far too long, email marketers have sat back complacently, in the firm belief that the junk mail tag only applies to the offline communications that consumers receive. In fact, any form of marketing that is mistargeted, badly composed or difficult to respond to can be classified as junk. In the first of a series of articles Volker Wiewer, CEO of eCircle explains that to ensure cut-through, email marketers need to ensure they employ some basic best practice steps...

Use your company name as addressee for more attention

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It's amazing how many companies don't do this – perhaps in a bid to remain informal and personal, perhaps as a cryptic tactic to evoke intrigue and mystery. In actual fact, this approach is just more likely to ensure your mail is consigned to the junk mail folder. Rely on your good name and use your brand as the delivery address. That way, you are legally on the safe side and of course you catch the recipient's eye with a recognised name rather than an unfamiliar one.

Use your subject line as a teaser

This one's simple. Your email communications need to make it past the first hurdle – you need people to open them. And of course, the only way this will happen is if the subject line catches their interest. So, be concise, make the benefit to the recipient clear and prompt them to take action. Don't leave room for misinterpretation, make the benefits clear and put out an unmistakable call to action.

Picture this...

Pictures can enhance the performance of your communications – but only if they are relevant to the content. Irrelevant images that add nothing to the email can actually have a negative impact on the brand. So, choose images that pay back to your tone, image and specific communication proposition. And once the images are sorted – make sure the whole thing works without them! Automatic image suppression is the digital creative director's worst nightmare, but it's a fact of life, so make sure your email works with or without the images.

Open more than one channel of communication

You may well be opting to communicate via email, but don't forget that the average consumer is well and truly multi-channel. Don't cut off any of these channels by omitting any contact details – feature phone numbers, postal addresses, basically anything else that will make it easier for your customers to talk to you about your offer.

Link to the web version

Again, another often-missed opportunity is acknowledging that some people simply prefer reading in a browser rather than a preview window. This is about giving your customer the choice, and making sure that you make it as easy as possible for them to receive your message. Integrate a link to the web version in as prominent a place as possible.

Forwarding feature

A recommendation from your target audience is what every marketer wants. That is why you should provide your recipients with the possibility to forward the newsletter directly from the newsletter template, allowing you to track the number of forwards. What better measure of success than the fact that your recipient has taken the time to support you in your marketing campaign and pass your message on independently?

Link to profile data

If your emails are part of regular communications and you hold profile data on your recipients, then link through to a chance to update this data. This way you can ensure that your audience has the opportunity to ensure you target them in exactly the right way by cleaning and updating their details. This approach also means you are far more likely to avoid the dreaded unsubscription. If you give your audience the chance to say 'this isn't quite right for me, but here's what would be really useful, thanks!' then you reduce the chances of them saying 'Unsubscribe me'.

In essence, the key to orchestrating best practice is to remember the point of your email communications. You want to reach your target audience with a specific message. So if you start forgetting the audience or the message, you will run into trouble, and risk falling foul of the junk mail tag. Target your audience correctly, engage with your audience, make it easy for them to respond and keep the lines of