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How to guarantee success with your festive email campaigns

Published: 09 December 2008 00:00



Apparently 'tis the season to be jolly but many retailers are no doubt worrying about how the credit crunch will affect this years sales. Despite the challenging economic climate, Christmas will still be a crucial time for retailers and brands alike. Consumers won't stop buying altogether but, will instead be more selective in their purchases and prioritise value above other factors. With this in mind it is even more important to ensure your marketing strategy hits the spot. According to the DMA, commercial email has the highest return on investment – better than all the other channels. This makes email one of the most cost effective ways of getting your message to your customers. In this month's column, Volker Wiewer, CEO of eCircle gives you five email tips for the holiday season.

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1) Reward your customers:

Last year, over a third of top retailers mentioned gift cards in their emails at least once in the five days before Christmas (research by Email Experience Council). Smart retailers understand that gift vouchers and discount vouchers are both important tools in the run up to Christmas because they offer one of the most effective ways to reward a customer. By sending an email offering users a gift card of £15 if they spend £50 online, not only ensures that you are making your customer feel good but you are also encouraging repeat purchases.

You only have to think about Thresher's 2006 discount voucher that was 'accidentally' emailed to consumers. They had one of the best seasons to date and managed to generate enough interest to get consumers queuing round the block for their products.

Gift vouchers by comparison are the perfect gift for lazy shoppers. They can be emailed directly and tackle the problem for those hard to buy for people. Vouchers are also a great option not only for last minute gifts but also for those you need to send over a distance.

2) Remind:

If your diary is anything like mine, December just slips away. It is wise to encourage your customers to buy early, get ahead of the crowd and secure those must have gifts. Email can also be a great way to tell your customers the last shopping dates for delivery before Christmas.

For those who still leave it too late you can make things easier, by highlighting the best options whether that's fast overnight delivery or a 'buy online pick up in store service'. These tactics can help to create a sense of urgency and remind customers they need to plan ahead.

3) Keep it relevant:

It is a busy time of year for everyone, so your customers will only respond to the most significant and relevant information. You should be using your data to target information you send. Look at what your data tells you, are some users more receptive to offer driven emails e.g. coupons and vouchers or would they prefer you use content driven emails with suggestions and ideas such as gift buying guides. Use this information to segment your data and target accordingly.

As Christmas approaches competition on the market picks up and that means crowded inboxes. Relevancy is the key to ensure your email is seen.

4) Reaching Further:

If you're after a broader or deeper reach consider list buying to extend your messages. While it is often preferable to organically grow your database, sometimes it's not a practical approach in the midst of a busy season. List buying allows you to quickly extend your database.

This needn't mean you are attacking inboxes at random. Rather with select screening, you can ensure you have the most relevant contacts based on a number of factors. For examples the contacts that have shown an interest in your sector, are keen on receiving offers or even have a long history of making their purchases online.

5) Social Media:

This is all about giving power to the people and you need to embrace it. Customer reviews are becoming a more important part of the consumer decision-making process so why not include some within your email. You can also provide a link to a feedback form on the email which will encourage customer engagement and ultimately trust.

The great thing about these simple tips is that they can be put into practice quickly and with relative ease. By rewarding your customer, keeping it relevant and testing ways to generate customer involvement over the Christmas period you'll be well on your way to raising your revenue and having a merry Christmas after all.