

# 10 Top Tips for E-Marketing to the IT Sector



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This paper provides 10 top tips for improving your email marketing campaigns. It covers every element of campaign creation, from targeting the best data and writing the perfect message, to improving email deliverability and testing for the most responsive creative.

It is intended for marketing professionals who create email campaigns targeted at IT professionals, and are looking to increase response to their campaigns, or for beginners to email marketing who are looking for tips on creating a successful campaign.

## 1. It's what you know that counts

As the use of email marketing continues to grow, marketers face an increasing challenge to ensure that their email stands out from inbox clutter. Therefore it has become crucial to ensure that you are targeting the right people with a relevant message. This means using everything you know about your audience to better segment and target them in order to achieve the best ROI possible.

- **Concentrate on what customers do:** Valuable data and information can be gained by focusing on customer behaviour. How they respond to your emails, what pages they view from click throughs, how often they visit your website, past purchases can all provide information by which to better segment and target your audience with the right offering.
- **Have your target audiences in mind when renting lists:** What are their job titles? What areas of responsibility do they have e.g. IT security/ Networking? What size of company do they work in? What are their current needs? The more information you have about them, the more relevant you can make your mailing and the more qualified each sales lead will be.

## 2. Make your offering relevant & unique

Develop content strategies based on the content people want and respond to. Every campaign you send must answer the question "What's in it for me?" Whatever your call to action, it must be worth recipients taking the time to respond to your campaign.

- **Know your audience:** Provide perks that are gold to the recipients. As discussed in the last section, in order to create a successful campaign you must offer something relevant and useful to your target audience. Although IT decision makers are usually driven by organisational needs, the decision to attend an event, for example, may be dependent on how it will benefit them as an individual. Will it develop their skills and enhance career progression? Will they get exclusive access to a VIP event? It pays to know how they have behaved in the past.
- **Make sure it works:** Test your calls to action before launching a campaign. At IT Media, we find that white papers and industry reports consistently outperform case studies, free trials, downloads and webcasts as the best calls to action for IT Decision Makers on our database, but it is always worth checking this out with your own data.

## 3. Get it in the inbox

It's all very well spending time on segmenting the data and creating a unique and appealing message, but if you can't get your email in your audience's inbox then it will have been a waste of time. Deliverability is a big issue when emailing the IT sector, especially to office addresses, as each organisation will have different security settings. However, there are several things you can do to improve your chances.

- **Mail regularly and tell recipients to expect your message:** Make sure you email everyone on your list at least once every ninety days to keep your list up to date and prevent bounces. Ask your recipients to add you to their address book to ensure they continue to receive your emails.
- **Practise good list hygiene:** Only send content that recipients have registered to receive, keep your list clean of opted out or incorrect addresses and sign up for feedback loops from ISPs, e.g. Hotmail, Yahoo and Gmail. These actions will help to improve your reputation and prevent blacklisting.

- **Don't get tripped up by spam filters:** Use content checking software before sending your email to reduce the chance of it getting caught up in filters. OnlineWebCheck.com provides a free check on HTML code.
- **Set up test accounts and check renderability:** Always test your email in various email clients, including your work email, hotmail, yahoo etc to ensure they render properly.

#### 4. Simple designs are safest

Research suggests that most people view their emails in a preview pane, as a way of sorting through the clutter of their inbox. Although there are many email clients in use; Outlook, Lotus Notes, Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo – nearly all use image blocks as a default, meaning that a person must right click to see the images. And all they will see in their preview pane is a box with a red cross.

So with most recipients not being able to view the HTML correctly it is not possible to entice them with flashy images and design. So what can you do to ensure you still capture their attention?

- **Choose text over images:** Keep HTMLs text heavy so that most of the email will display correctly. Ensure that all headers and important information is in text form so that recipients know what you are trying to say without have to right click to download the images.
- **Use alt tags behind all images:** Entice recipients with key phrases that will encourage them to download the image and click through.
- **Repeat calls to action in text:** If you are using buttons then repeat your calls to action in text to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to click through. Also add a link into the first third of the email so that it appears in the preview pane, allowing recipients the opportunity to click through without scrolling down the email.
- **Stick to simple coding:** Avoid CSS and other styling codes to ensure your code displays exactly as you intended. This is particularly important when emailing decision makers as anyone using Outlook 2007 will not be able to view this kind of code at all.
- **Get in the address book:** Encourage users to add you to their address book, as this means your images will be downloaded automatically in the future.

#### 5. Why say it in three sentences when one will do?

People make a decision to delete an email in a few seconds so it is really important to capture their attention (and keep it). This is especially valid when emailing IT Decision Makers who receive around 100 emails everyday. How do you get recipients to read your email?

- **Keep it short and simple:** The KISS principle is highly relevant. Keep copy down to around 100-150 words as it is unlikely your audience have the time to read anything longer. Use short sentences and paragraphs to enable recipients to scan read the text.
- **Emphasise your key points with bullets:** Try not to use any more than five bullet points, as more than this becomes a long list and none of the text will stand out to the reader.
- **Don't beat around the bush:** Be direct and to the point. State why you are sending the email and what's in it for the recipient. Make it clear what the call to action is and mention it in the first paragraph to ensure recipients see it in the preview pane.

## 6. Make it easy to respond

Up to 50 per cent of visitors to your landing page will bail out in the first few seconds. The web page you lead your target audience to could determine whether you make a sale or lose their interest completely. So what can you do to improve your conversion rate?

- **Avoid dumping clickers at the home page:** Don't make them wander your site in search of answers.
- **Create a unique page for each campaign:** Grab attention quickly by matching the promotional copy in the email, with a bespoke page. Otherwise, recipients will be taken aback when they click on a link and end up on a landing page without the same look and feel as the email that captured their attention. A unique landing page also allows you to track where your leads are coming from
- Capture prospective customer's information as quickly as possible with a **simple registration form**, which draws out the key benefits to each user of leaving their details. Asking too many questions can lead prospective customers to become wary and frustrated enough that they abandon the process.
- **Take the time to say thank you** for filling out the form and follow up with an email to confirm what they have bought or signed up for. This will enable you to start to build a relationship with them.

## 7. Don't forget the importance of the subject line

This could be the most important line you will ever write for your campaign. It is your first – and maybe last – opportunity to persuade them to read the email. Don't make the mistake of spending time on the copy, only to think your subject line up in two minutes.

- **Generate interest with branding:** Including the **brand or company name** in the subject line gives you the opportunity to create recognition with your audience or to introduce yourself, which will generate interest in the email.
- **Remember 'WIIFM':** What's in it for me? If there isn't something about the subject line that lets them know why its worth their time to see what's inside, then the choice will be clear. Emphasise the **call to action** and convey a sense of **urgency** to spark an immediate reaction.
- **Get personal:** The more you can make each contact feel like you're speaking directly to them, the more effective your communication will be. Whatever style of subject line you use, you can make it personal by using the word "you". Make the email more targeted by mentioning the audience e.g "IT Contractors – Maximise your take-home pay".
- **Get shorty:** Assume that recipients see only the first 56 characters, so be short and precise, and allow the subject line to reflect the content of the email. Don't mislead recipients; the subject line should reflect exactly what's in the email, as this will affect their propensity to open future emails from you.
- **Avoid words likely to get picked up as spam**, such as 'free'. You can find a list of words and phrases to avoid at [http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt8/spamfilter\\_phrases.htm](http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt8/spamfilter_phrases.htm).

## 8. Testing, Testing...

A great aspect of email marketing is the ability to test and track campaigns, allowing you to continually improve on previous results and bump up your ROI.

It is becoming a critical aspect of email marketing programmes, as how your email list responds may be completely different from current industry expectations, and even segments within your list may differ in their behaviour. For example, at IT Media we generally find that IT Decision Makers prefer simple text based HTMLs, whereas IT professionals respond more positively to more flashy HTML.

- **Testing doesn't have to be complicated.** In fact simple A/B tests are the most effective way to determine which variable is more successful. Changing more than one aspect of your copy at the same time will make it near impossible to decipher what it was that caused the bigger response. A few ideas for tests include:
  - **Text versus HTML:** Research suggests that network professionals prefer text emails to HTML ones, but why not test to find out?
  - **Subject lines:** This is one of the most important aspects of your campaign, as it can make the difference between a person opening your email or not, so testing is crucial.
  - **Best time of day/ week to send:** This can vary by industry and even company
- **Use the results to improve future campaigns.** Otherwise you will have wasted valuable information about your audience's preferences. Review the test and determine how you will use it going forward. Communicate your findings to colleagues to ensure everyone benefits.
- **Run the same tests regularly.** What works well now could become a complete faux pas in three month's time, so make sure to test the same elements of your campaigns periodically.

## 9. Learn from your mistakes (& successes) through analysis

Email marketing allows you to measure the effectiveness of your campaigns at every stage of the process, in real-time, so you are able to use it to inform and guide future activity.

Your main measurement analysis should not be based on opens and clicks, but should be on the number of leads that are generated from the email. This is, after all, the reason for a campaign in the first place.

However, measuring the open, click through and conversion rates are also highly important in determining what works and doesn't work, and can therefore be used to improve on future campaigns. For example, a high open rate and low click through rate suggests that the copy or call to action could be improved. A high open and click through rate but lack of leads could mean that both the subject line and copy are effective, but the landing page needs improvement.

It is vital that you understand the relationship between each measurement, as it will enable you to see which stage of the campaign is letting you down and which is performing well. This will guide any changes you make.

## 10. Stay ahead of the competition

As the direct marketing landscape changes so rapidly, it is incredibly important to be aware of these advances, so that your email marketing continues to be effective. Stay ahead of the competition by testing and implementing new ideas early on. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Do your research:** Subscribe to weekly email marketing bulletins. If you don't have time to read them when they enter your inbox save them and keep half an hour free each week to go through them.

- **Investigate email marketing to mobiles:** IT Decision Makers and professionals working on multiple sites are likely to access their emails on their mobiles. But do you know if your regular HTML emails are rendering correctly for them? Don't automatically assume that mobile recipients will receive the plain text version, they usually don't so test this for yourself and look into creating a *Click here to read on your mobile phone* link.
- **Nothing works forever:** As discussed in section 8, aspects of your campaign that work well now will not necessarily work well in the future. That's why it is increasingly important to keep up to date on the changes reported by other email marketing professionals in their newsletters and blogs.

For example, the release of Outlook 2007 caused many HTML rendering problems due to its inability to support CSS coding. Email marketers who discovered this early on were able to benefit from less deliverability and display problems than those who continued to use complex HTML coding.

**If you have any questions regarding anything mentioned in the above guide please feel free to contact IT Media on 0207 307 6322 or email us at [info@itmediaonline.com](mailto:info@itmediaonline.com).**