SPECIAL REPORT

The State of Email List Growth

Developing list growth strategies to meet the demands of today’s subscriber
Special Report

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The State of Email List Growth

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Email Experience Council reports that each year corporations lose roughly one-third of their email addresses. No matter how healthy your organization’s list is or how relevant your communications are, there is a constant need to add new subscribers. A vibrant and targeted email database can be one of your brand’s biggest assets. This network of names enables you to have conversations with your core audience at critical moments for your business, from new product announcements to crisis communications.

Often you hear that “the money is in the list” when discussing email marketing. However, this statement is only true if the list is accurate and full of quality subscribers. This reflects a shift in strategy from building the largest list to a more targeted list of active subscribers who are enchanted with your content and offers.

No longer will running a “one-size-fits-all” sweepstakes that drives potential subscribers to single website registration be successful. Today’s subscribers expect brands to be proactive, finding them at locations and times they prefer, all while offering to deliver only content they deem relevant. Furthermore, the exchange for their valuable email address ought to be easy.

To meet these rising expectations, organizations must understand their potential subscriber’s needs. What do they want? What are their challenges? How do they prefer to communicate? Marketers can gain valuable insights by listening via social media monitoring services, surveys or Web analytics. Another option is to be straightforward and ask new subscribers to decide what they receive – and how they’ll receive it – through a robust preference center. Making the commitment to deliver only valuable information without endless promotion can be challenging, yet the reward is an active and loyal tribe of brand evangelists.

With so many opportunities for potential customer interaction, and the explosion of new communication channels such as SMS, mobile and social media, subscriber acquisition strategies have become more complex. A multifaceted and highly targeted approach to list building is required.

To learn more about the latest strategies, MarketingSherpa conducted a study involving nearly 1,100 email marketers. Here is just some of the feedback we received from study participants who were asked:

Which email marketing challenge is your organization having the most difficulty overcoming and why?

“Getting people to opt-in and preventing people from opting-out are the two biggest concerns right now. We can’t seem to come up with an efficient, usable action plan designed with those two goals in mind.”

“Quality of email lists. We lack the staff and budget to conduct email list building and clean-up campaigns”

Are you facing similar challenges? We will share the results of our email list growth study in this Special Report. The in-depth analysis, valuable benchmark data and marketer insights found within will aid in constructing the right list building strategy for your organization.
**EMAIL LIST GROWTH TRENDS**

**CHART: EMAIL LIST GROWTH TREND, BY PRIMARY CHANNEL**

Q. Which best describes your organization's email list growth trend for the past 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Business channel (B2B)</th>
<th>Consumer channel (B2C)</th>
<th>Both channels (B2B2C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very positive - our list is rapidly growing</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat positive - our list is slowly growing</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral - the gains balance out the losses</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat negative - our list is slowly shrinking</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very negative - our list is rapidly shrinking</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded Sep 2010, N=1,115

Email marketers should find this chart reassuring. Email subscription is not diminishing, as each group of marketers had less than seven percent negative list growth. Email continues to be an important communication channel between businesses and customers.

Additionally, more than half of email marketers surveyed in all channels made incremental growth in their list sizes. This may be a reflection of the changing strategy for email list development, as marketers are seeking to build long-term relationships with email subscribers. Rather than making quick growth and large lists the priority, marketers are choosing to focus resources on nurturing these new relationships with meaningful content to assist the subscribers’ progression on the path to purchase.

“It's not growth I'm concerned with, it is quality. I can build a lot of numbers, but if they aren't the right names, it is just a waste.”

- Study participant
CHALLENGES TO LIST GROWTH

Marketers know email is a communication tool that encompasses the entire marketing funnel, linking in-store activity, online shopping, social sharing and Web-based searches. Organizations find the use of automated email extremely effective in quickly responding to customer interactions. Triggered emails communicate with consumers at the moment they need valuable information, to move them towards making a purchase.

However, there is a disconnect between knowing the Marketing and Sales funnel will be hampered without a healthy list, and making it a firm’s priority. In this survey, “Increasing the size of email opt-in lists” ranked below other top-tier objectives including increasing sales, lead generation, website traffic, customer retention and brand awareness. These results make for a sound business argument, but show the difficulty marketers have in giving list development the attention it deserves.

The chart below shows the percentage of respondents by channel that identify list growth as an important email marketing objective.

CHART: MOST IMPORTANT EMAIL MARKETING OBJECTIVES, BY PRIMARY CHANNEL

Q. How important are the following email marketing objectives to your organization?

- Increasing size of email opt-in lists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business channel (B2B)</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer channel (B2C)</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both channels (B2B2C)</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded Sept. 2010, N=1,115
Recognizing both internal and external challenges, survey respondents identified “Getting people to opt-in to email lists” as the second-most significant challenge behind “Targeting recipients with highly relevant content.” List growth was among the top three challenges, regardless of company size or business channel.

**Chart: The Significance of Challenges to Improve Email Effectiveness**

Q. How significant are the following challenges to email marketing effectiveness?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Very Significant</th>
<th>Somewhat Significant</th>
<th>Not Significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting people to opt-in to email lists</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping people from opting-out of email lists</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart also shares marketers’ outlooks on maintaining opt-in lists. Their confidence may be due to the adoption of hosting a preference center. Frequently asking email members to update their profile benefits a brand’s long-term relationship. Marketers recognize that subscribers are not the same people they were when they originally signed up for an email subscription. It is vital to capture changes in subscribers’ profiles, including interests, occupations, and current email addresses.

Giving customers the ability to control the frequency, communication channel and subject matter demonstrates the respect a brand has for a subscriber’s valuable time. Many companies now give customers the choice to opt down in the frequency of messages rather than opting out. Another popular alternative is allowing members to pause their subscription. For example, when a recipient goes on vacation, he or she can set the date the email delivery will stop and start up again.

Please note, our survey found that 35 percent of respondents collected and used “Volunteered content preferences,” while eight percent collected the data but did not use it. In addition, this study found that only 18 percent of marketers collected and used “Volunteered delivery frequencies.” In this age of real-time communications, asking for delivery preferences in terms of frequency or day does not appear to be a priority. As long as the information is relevant, it seems consumers are open to receiving the information immediately. A preference center allows organizations to send messages on the subscribers’ terms.
The result is that email recipients are not only more likely to welcome and open a brand’s communications, but also to respond to the enclosed offer. Moreover, a preference center provides an excellent opportunity for the subscriber to increase their engagement with the brand. Customers may visit a preference page and see additional resources, newsletters and communication channels they were not aware of previously.

**CHART: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EMAIL MARKETING AT ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES**

*Q. How effective is email marketing at achieving the following objectives for your organization?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not effective</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat effective</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very effective</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart reveals that very few marketers feel they have mastered the objective of continuously increasing the size of email opt-in lists. A majority of marketers are looking for strategies and techniques to better build a quality list of subscribers, with the hope of turning these people into loyal, happy customers.

**LIST GROWTH TACTICS**

There are myriad tactics available to marketers to grow their email marketing lists. Each will have a different level of effectiveness based on the organization and its customer base. Marketers may find it challenging to have list growth atop their minds, but inviting customers and prospects to opt-in is essential to success. Be ready to ask on a regular basis. Make requests in customer-service email signatures, business cards, sales collateral, receipts or even on products.

We wanted to learn more about the tactics marketers choose to generate list growth. The chart on the next page gives an overview of the difficulty, effectiveness and popularity of each list growth tactic.
In the chart above, marketers recognize registering for downloads, webinars and newsletters are effective methods to grow email lists, which reflects a trend towards content marketing. Publishing valuable information and demonstrating industry thought leadership attracts new subscribers. This tactic is most effective when the content is both appealing and purposeful to fulfilling potential customers’ needs, wants and desires.

"Posting good content will always be the best way to grow our list. Finding out when there is new free content on the website is the only benefit of subscribing."

- Study participant

Let’s take a closer look at each of the of the data points surrounding various tactics usage, effectiveness and degree of difficulty.
CHART: TACTICS USED TO DRIVE EMAIL LIST GROWTH, BY PRIMARY CHANNEL

Q. Which of the following tactics is your organization using to drive email list growth?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Business channel (B2B)</th>
<th>Consumer channel (B2C)</th>
<th>Both channels (B2B2C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email newsletter subscriptions</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline events / tradeshows</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration for downloads, etc.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email forward-to-a-friend</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online events / webinars</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid search</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sharing buttons in email</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration during purchase</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-registration programs</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile capture</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded Sep 2010, N=1,115

E-newsletter subscriptions lead the email list growth tactics for all channels. The methods companies use to grow their lists fit their overall business channel marketing practices. Forward-to-a-friend, social sharing buttons and purchase registrations are popular with B2C companies. B2B companies find trade shows, whitepaper downloads and webinars desirable. Let’s examine two of these B2B tactics in more detail.
**TRADE SHOWS**

Trade shows and corporate events can be time-consuming and resource-draining endeavors. With so much invested, marketers want to get the most out of the leads generated and convert them to revenue. Be careful not to assume that because an attendee gave you a business card, it means you have the right to add them to your email list. It is best to follow up by email with them once, just as they would expect a call from a salesperson. Leverage all available marketing tactics to turn conversations on the show floor into conversions.

If you are fortunate enough to speak at a conference, mention your opt-in offer. Add the URL address or QR code at the end of your presentation slides.

**WEBINARS**

Webinars have become a great source of lead generation, especially for B2B companies. During the registration, or at the close of the webinar, you may offer an attendee the chance to opt-in to your newsletter. Similar to trade show leads, these attendees can be contacted by your sales force and given the opportunity to enroll for your email communications. If you choose to email the offer, only send it once.

---

"Webinars are a great source for growing our B2B lists.

- Study participant"

**DIFFICULT LIST GROWTH TACTICS**

Companies do not find all tactics in the previous chart easy to implement. The chart on the following page shows how different channels rank tactics by difficulty. Some tactics take more time and resources to execute. Others, like webinars and whitepaper downloads, are not a common practice for B2C companies, and thus classify as difficult.

**CO-REGISTRATION PROGRAMS**

One tactic that is difficult by nature is the co-registration program. This is an agreement by two or more companies to place opt-in checkboxes on each other’s websites or landing pages. The effectiveness of attracting and keeping qualified subscribers is based on how well an organization selects its partners. Some guidelines to follow when placing your opt-in checkboxes are to create similar offers, and never have the boxes pre-checked when the customer arrives. The copy should be short, and should use language that clearly describes the value the subscriber will receive from enrolling. Again, partners and their offers should be similar to a marketer’s brand, which might mean a direct competitor. If a company is confident in their product, they should not worry. To prevent cluttered pages and devalue a brand’s name, limit the number of other offers on a page to less than ten.

For this acquisition tactic, marketers will need to monitor new subscribers carefully. Watch the average opens, clicks and quality of conversions to measure your success. Some marketers have found it beneficial to keep them in a separate database, and nurture new opt-ins with welcome messages until the activity matches their house list’s behavior. Once this criterion is met, new subscribers can be moved over to the core email list.
CHART: EMAIL LIST GROWTH TACTICS RATED DIFFICULT, BY PRIMARY CHANNEL

Q. Please indicate the degree of difficulty (time, effort and expense) for each of the email list growth tactics your organization is using.

Again, tactics like co-registration, paid search and trade shows were graded difficult because of the amount of time, effort and expense the marketing department must exert. Likewise, adding forward-to-a-friend or social sharing buttons to email communications is considered easier, as these elements are typically part of an email service provider’s software package.
Effective List Growth Tactics

Chart: Email List Growth Tactics Rated Very Effective, by Primary Channel

Q. Please indicate the level of effectiveness for each of the email list growth tactics your organization is using.

- Registration for downloads, etc.: 64% (54% Business channel (B2B), 37% Consumer channel (B2C), 50% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Mobile capture: 50% (33% Business channel (B2B), 25% Consumer channel (B2C), 33% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Online events / webinars: 47% (25% Business channel (B2B), 33% Consumer channel (B2C), 33% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Registration during purchase: 71% (56% Business channel (B2B), 45% Consumer channel (B2C), 45% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Co-registration programs: 40% (22% Business channel (B2B), 22% Consumer channel (B2C), 22% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Offline events / tradeshows: 35% (28% Business channel (B2B), 28% Consumer channel (B2C), 28% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Paid search: 31% (27% Business channel (B2B), 27% Consumer channel (B2C), 27% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Email newsletter subscriptions: 29% (27% Business channel (B2B), 27% Consumer channel (B2C), 27% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Email forward-to-a-friend: 12% (7% Business channel (B2B), 7% Consumer channel (B2C), 7% Both channels (B2B2C))
- Social sharing buttons in email: 19% (4% Business channel (B2B), 4% Consumer channel (B2C), 4% Both channels (B2B2C))

Source: MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded Sep 2010, N=1,115
Responses to the effectiveness of email list growth tactics break according to a channel’s sales and marketing processes. This trend is exemplified in B2C favoring registration during purchase.

B2C sales traditionally have a shorter sales cycle, and it is more common for them to carry out transactions over the Web as compared to B2B companies. Meanwhile, B2B companies find webinars and registration downloads as effective means to walking a prospect through a B2B Marketing and Sales funnel.

Again, these results align well with content marketing strategies. Tactics that deliver value to the customer (i.e. purchased products, downloaded material or webinars) develop trusted relationships, enabling customers to share their email addresses and contact information. For this reason, company blogs and published articles have become excellent devices to capture email addresses.

We expect to see growth in mobile capture in the coming year. This is due to the rapid adoption of smartphone technology and how marketer’s rank “Mobile capture” as effective.

SMS
Statics show that teenagers, on average, text 3,000 messages per month. This widespread adoption of texting has enabled marketers to use text applications to recruit opt-ins. Look for these requests on billboards, bus wraps or even airplane napkins. The simplicity of the required action, combined with limitless locations, has made this tactic very effective.

SMARTPHONES AND QR CODES
According to a Nielsen study published in May 2011, email dominates time spent on the mobile Web. Combined with Comscore’s data in November 2010, there are 70 million US consumers accessing email on their smartphones, making it essential for marketers to reach out to consumers on their mobile phones.

The next evolution to make email enrollment even easier is the Quick Response Code (QR code). This two-dimensional bar code can be read by a smartphone, allowing consumers to immediately expand upon a real-world experience and link to a wealth of information. Jumping to the Internet is easier with QR codes, as opposed to typing an intricate URL. Ideally, a QR code should take you to a mobile-optimized Web page.

Watch for them on movie posters, magazine ads, trade show booths or on the hood of NASCAR driver Danica Patrick’s race car. For example, download one of the many QR code apps available for Apple, Android or Blackberry phones, scan the image on the left, and it will take you directly to MarketingSherpa’s landing page to register for our newsletter.

The codes are easy to generate using popular free service, qrcode.kaywa.com. Once created, brands can add them to any of its existing marketing vehicles. Application ideas include business cards, products or even promotional temporary tattoos.

“The most effective list growth tactic our organization has used is opting in all users who register and download a software product...”

-CMO study participant
SOCIAL MEDIA LIST GROWTH TACTICS

CHART: SOCIAL SHARING BUTTONS USED IN EMAIL CAMPAIGNS, BY PRIMARY CHANNEL

Q. Which of the following social sharing buttons do you use in email campaigns to enable recipients to share your organization's email content with their networks, followers, etc.?

- Twitter: 89% (B2B), 87% (B2C), 91% (B2B2C)
- Facebook: 85% (B2B), 95% (B2C), 91% (B2B2C)
- LinkedIn: 25% (B2B), 75% (B2C), 47% (B2B2C)
- Delicious: 13% (B2B), 11% (B2C), 11% (B2B2C)
- Digg: 21% (B2B), 16% (B2C), 20% (B2B2C)
- StumbleUpon: 8% (B2B), 9% (B2C), 8% (B2B2C)
- Reddit: 4% (B2B), 9% (B2C), 9% (B2B2C)
- Other: 10% (B2B), 9% (B2C), 8% (B2B2C)
- Google Buzz: 10% (B2B), 7% (B2C), 13% (B2B2C)
- Yahoo! Buzz: 4% (B2B), 7% (B2C), 7% (B2B2C)
- MySpace: 7% (B2B), 11% (B2C), 20% (B2B2C)

Source: MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded Sep 2010, N=1,115
SHARE WITH YOUR NETWORK (SWYN) BUTTONS

In the early stages of a company’s social media maturation, regardless of marketing channel the most popular and widely adopted social media technologies are selected for social sharing. The one exception is LinkedIn, which has carved its niche for B2B social networking.

As email marketers learn the unique advantages of each social media application, they will have the opportunity to match their content with the appropriate social media bookmark. Facebook and LinkedIn lead in usage of social sharing buttons for their respective B2C and B2B social networking sites. Twitter ranks number one for microblogs, Digg number one for social news, and Delicious number one for social bookmarking tools. These bookmarking tools (i.e. Digg, StumbleUpon and Reddit) can make your emails easier to find and share across the Web to entice consumers to join your mailing list. Most ESPs offer a tool as part of their application to add these buttons. Alternatively, you can drop in HTML code provided by the individual social media sites or aggregator tools like AddThis into your email.

We recommend that organizations start with no more than three displayed buttons and then perform tests on their effectiveness. Too many buttons may overwhelm the reader and “paralyze” them in the sharing process. Keep in mind that to maximize the effectiveness of your sharing buttons, they should be prominently displayed in your emails. Encourage subscribers to share and explain to them the benefits.

FACEBOOK REGISTRATION PAGE

With more than 750 million users, Facebook is a behemoth not only in social media, but throughout the Web. With the amount of traffic inside Facebook, marketers are now searching for new subscribers to register on company fan pages. In the past, marketers used Facebook’s Static Facebook Markup Language (FBML) code to do this themselves.

In early 2011, Facebook redesigned their brand page, removed tabs from the top, and placed links to the left, underneath photos. It represented a technological shift from FBML to iFrames code. This makeover now allows marketers to generate more engagement with their fans, as the frames act more like Web pages. In addition, many ESPs, such as Constant Contact, provide turnkey tools for brands to add registration pages to Facebook.

DINGO BRAND’S JOIN MY MAILING LIST CAMPAIGN

Dingo Brand, a maker of meat and rawhide treats for dogs, won Gold for the “Best Email List Growth Campaign” category in the 2011 MarketingSherpa Email Awards. Dingo Brand’s 2010 Join My Mailing List campaign was directed towards an audience of both current and prospective customers. The immediate goals were two-fold. First, the company hoped to increase the number of new subscribers to their existing email list. Secondly, Dingo enticed current customers and Facebook followers to share information about the campaign with their own networks in an attempt to make the brand go viral.

As a means of enticing current and prospective customers to join its mailing list, Dingo promised that the first 5,000 Facebook followers to join would receive a $20 coupon redeemable at DingoBrand.com. The catch? No one would receive the coupon until Dingo Brand’s Facebook "Like" reached 5,000 (they started with only 330 "Likes"). Once the 5,000 likes were achieved, the coupon would be emailed to customers.
This condition is similar to those employed by group discount sites such as Groupon, which make daily deals contingent upon a minimum number of buyers.

**Results:**

Dingo’s Facebook page went from 330 "Likes" to more than 5,000 "Likes" in three days. More impressive was the tremendous list growth that Dingo Brand achieved. When the organization began its campaign in July, it had a little more than 14,000 subscribers. In a six-month period, Dingo's total email contact list grew by approximately 48 percent.

With a targeted acquisition campaign, Dingo’s team produced an email list with low attrition. As a result, Dingo has been able to increase its brand awareness and retain a large audience of interested email subscribers who continue to produce a steady 27 percent email campaign open rate.

**SOCIAL GAMES**

Another acquisition strategy is to build your own game similar to the successful "FarmVille" and "FrontierVille." That is exactly what the NBA’s Boston Celtics did when it created a Facebook game called "3-Point Play." The game consists of fans predicting the statistics of three players before each regular season Celtics game, and receiving points based on the accuracy of their predictions.

The game was conceived in 2009 when the Celtics had 400,000 Facebook fans but without any collected data on them. They thought the game would be a fun way to involve fans and get them into their database. The registration process required fans to share their birthdates and email addresses. The Celtics’ landing page included a check box to receive special offers via email. In 2009, the Celtics had 50,000 unique fans sign up.

**Games and entertainment can quickly go viral**

In today’s social sharing environment, popular games and videos can quickly go viral and effectively help build your email database. The magnetic content attracts visitors you might not have otherwise found. In the following case study, read how an NHL hockey team used customized Flash video to grow their list 10 percent in one week.
CASE STUDY: PERSONALIZED AUDIO/VIDEO FLASH APP GROWS LIST 10%

Case Study ID #CS31702:
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library
Summary: See how the Washington Capitals increased its newsletter list size nearly 10% with an audio Flash app designed to engage fans during the NHL playoffs.

CHALLENGE

During the 2009-10 season, the Washington Capitals were on a roll. The team was skating its way into the NHL playoffs and Joe Dupriest, Senior Director, Marketing, wanted to take advantage of the momentum to solidify relationships with the fan base. Dupriest and his team wanted a unique, interactive campaign that engaged fans with the Capitals brand while also adding email addresses to their house database.

CAMPAIGN

The Washington Capitals' "Slapstick" application let fans superimpose their own photos over the heads of a Capitals player or coach. Then, they could add audio to the Flash video and create an animated "rant" to inspire the Caps' fans, or answer questions in a mock press conference. A registration form to enable link sharing on fans' social networks also captured email addresses for the team's newsletter.

Here are the four steps they took to design and launch the application:

Step #1. Design coach- and player-themed Flash application
The team brainstormed several ideas for interactive, personalized Flash applications for hockey fans. They went for a humorous approach that allowed users to place their head (or their dog's head, or their baby's head, or any head they wanted) on a player or coach's body. Then, they invited them to create a special message to share with friends. The goal was to make something users were more likely to personalize and share. Please note, midway through the development process, the team learned that uploading photos to crop and paste into a Flash animation is a patented process. They signed a license agreement with the patent holder.

Step #2. Enable audio recording for further personalization
Creating a personalized message -- or "rant" -- was a key element in the team's strategy. The audio was combined with animation that made it appear as if the user's image was speaking.

Step #3. Include registration form for saving and sharing
The team created a simple registration form that let users save their Flash videos and receive links for sharing them on social networks. The form appeared toward the end of the process -- after the user had uploaded a photo and recorded a rant -- to make it less of a barrier. The form fields were name, email address, birth date (optional) and ZIP code (optional). The form also included a check box for users to opt-in to "Ice Chips," the team's official email newsletter.

Immediately upon registration, each user received an email containing links to the personalized Flash video. An overlay screen also provided buttons that let users share their creations on popular social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter.
Step #4. Launch and promote at start of playoffs
The team launched its application at the start of the NHL playoffs, to capture the increased fan enthusiasm and web traffic caused by that event. They promoted the Slapstick application in several ways, including adding links to the application on the team homepage, media outreach, and having the team's arena PA announcer create a video that was shown on the video scoreboard during a game.

RESULTS

Dupriest and his team were thrilled with initial fan reaction to the Slapstick application, until something unexpected happened: The Washington Capitals lost in the first round of the playoffs, eight days after the campaign launch.

However, during that time they saw results that convinced them to revive the Slapstick application for the upcoming NHL season.

In one week, they:

- Grew their email newsletter database by nearly 10%
- Received 15,000 impressions for the Slapstick site
- Saw 80% of users who created videos sharing them with their peers

"We exceed expectations, even though we know the impact could have been a lot bigger if the viral effect had had time to take off," says Dupriest.

Dupriest was particularly happy with the application's ability to add thousands of names to their database in one week. The team further tested the sustained impact of the application by running Slapstick promotions throughout the course of the next season and modifying it for the holiday season.
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The marketers’ insights shared in this report reflect the changes in today’s email marketing environment. Batch and blast email messages have evolved into targeted communications based on an individual’s preferences, behaviors and transactions with the brand. Email marketing’s greatest strength lies in providing communications that contain a high degree of value to its subscribers.

Each organization will choose the email acquisition tactics that best fit their business goals and customers. No matter which tactic you choose, it is important to make a good first impression. Just like in a personal relationship, this impression can make the difference between failure and success. Here are a few helpful hints to start off the subscriber relationship on the right foot.

SET EXPLICIT EXPECTATIONS
Establishing clear expectations during each stage of email communications will yield more long-term subscribers for an organization. At registration, businesses can inform new subscribers exactly what they plan to send, giving evergreen examples of their newsletters and offers. This simple courtesy will reduce a customer’s anxiety in the registration process and enable you to collect leads that are more qualified.

Adding a "join my mailing list" box with just a space to type an email address will not effectively communicate your brand’s value. Every opt-in page should answer these four questions:

What

Clearly state what type of content you will be sending. You may even want to include a picture or copy from a sample newsletter. The sample newsletter or email should contain “evergreen” content that is relevant to the potential subscriber.

When

Identify how often you will be sending email communications. Better yet, let the new subscriber set the frequency which they would like to receive emails from your company.

Why

The "why should I care?" or "what's in it for me?" questions must be plainly answered. Simply state in detail the features and benefits the subscriber will receive. The more descriptive and fact-based the copy, the more effective you will be at converting opt-ins. Don’t just say, "Sign up for our FREE newsletter!" but rather write from the subscriber’s point of view, by describing how the membership will assist in learning and solving challenges. Privacy Adding a link to your privacy policy will reassure the subscriber what your company will and won’t do with a submitted email address. Likewise, a succinct statement on how your brand addresses consumer privacy concerns will help alleviate any doubts. These tactics aid in overcoming the psychological fear of sharing personal information held by many potential opt-ins.
REGISTRATION PAGE DESIGN

With your direct mail, pay-per-click ad or Web page teaser, you have earned a click to your registration page. Maintain momentum by paving a path of logical next steps for new subscribers to follow. The primary goal of the registration page is to gain an opt-in. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind when designing your registration-landing page.

Creative consistency

The design elements of a registration page should be similar in style to the preceding ad or email that directed the visitor to this page. Consistent brand images, language and tone will allow the potential subscriber to know he or she landed on the correct page. To communicate your value proposition effectively, keep the page clean of clutter and multiple messages. Try changing the URL link to reflect the proper benefit your company is offering to the consumer.

Single mindedness

While teaching the MarketingExperiments Email Marketing Certification courses, Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, Managing Director/CEO, MECLABS, emphasizes that there is no place for unsupervised thinking in email communications. The only goal of the registration page is to capture an email address. Do not distract the potential subscriber with copy for new products, sales, events or links to navigate away from the registration page. These types of offers can always be made available on your "thank you" page.

Testimonials and more

Third-party endorsements can go a long way toward reducing a potential opt-in’s anxiety about sharing an email address. A well-written endorsement from a satisfied customer can evoke confidence and trust in your brand. A video testimonial can be even more effective, as people typically cannot resist hitting the play button.

A softer, more "low-key" endorsement tool is a subscriber counter. Seeing how many other people are benefiting from your email communications can establish you as a reputable source of information in the minds of potential members.

Comprehensive pictures of actual incentive gifts or newsletters can bolster the credibility of your brand and message. Conversely, consumers may interpret stock photos and generic sketches as insincere, which may negatively affect your brand’s integrity.

THANK YOU

After successfully capturing your new subscriber’s email address and contact information, the process does not end. Use your "thank you" page to build upon the relationship you started. Create a link to a past newsletter or other relevant pages on your website. One popular tactic is to send the subscriber to your preference center, where they can tailor their communications and you can capture more demographic data. Do not be afraid to add a little of your brand’s personality. Today, it is common to see embedded video or audio files in the thank you message, describing how recipients should proceed or expect to find in their email inboxes.
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