MarketingSherpa

EXCERPT

2009 Email Marketing

Benchmark Guide

Note: This is an authorized excerpt from the full 2009 Email Marketing Benchmark Guide. To download the entire Guide, go to: http://www.SherpaStore.com or call 877-895-1717

Director's Note

Welcome to MarketingSherpa's Email Marketing Benchmark Guide for 2009.

As always, this annual edition has been completely and comprehensively re-researched and rewritten. If you have an older edition around, stick it on the library shelf and start working from this new sixth edition – numbers have changed (in some cases dramatically) in the past 12 months.

In addition to all the basic email marketing stats you would expect, including cost and response data, we have included major *new* studies in this Guide:

#1. 2009 Email Marketing Benchmark Survey

1,763 real-life marketers from a range of business and consumer-focused firms answered our extensive survey (and some discussed their answers in follow-up calls) in August of 2008. They revealed:

- Which tests and tactics get the best ROI … and which get the worst
- What the challenges to email marketing are and what works to overcome them
- How they allocate budgets and measure results
- Response rates from opens to clicks, deliverability to conversion rates

Discover how your internal tactics and stats match up against the norm. You may be surprised.

#2. Consumers and Email Survey

1,438 representative Americans answered an extensive battery of questions to help marketers better understand how they perceive email, how they use it and how they can be better served by the medium. Among other things, we explored:

- What makes consumers more likely to subscribe to emails
- What makes them unsubscribe or simply stop reading
- How they are 'seeing' emails – how they configure preview panes and block images
- What kinds of emails people are receiving – what types of companies, how many emails and how it differs by household income, gender and a range of other demographic characteristics
- How Americans view email as a service, and how email stacks up against postal mail and the telephone The answers will surprise you.

#3. Email Eyetracking Study – Year Four

This year's explorations in eyetracking email focus on the differences in how we view text and image emails. Among the questions we explored:

- How do we overcome the effects of image blocking?
- What's the optimal way to format text or text-like emails?
- Is shorter better for product-heavy emails?

#4. International Email – Challenges and Opportunities

Roughly a quarter of large emailers reports that over 15% of their names are from overseas but nearly half aren't tracking this metric. International email offers opportunities and challenges. This special report explores some of the essential basics.

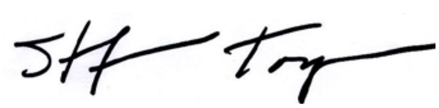
- How companies perceive and prioritize international email
- Country-specific information about deliverability and what works
- How leading-edge emailers are customizing email for international delivery

All in all, this year's edition of the Email Marketing Guide features 261 charts, tables and heatmaps. It's even thicker than our last edition and of even more practical value.

This report comes at a key point in the evolution of email marketing, as businesses seek cost-efficient ways to maximize impact and build relationships in what is likely to be a difficult stretch in the global economy. There will be new pressure on emailers to contribute to revenue without reducing the long-term value of their lists.

Our goal is to make your job easier. If you can't find a needed marketing stat here, please let us know. We will be sure to continue to widen our research efforts to see if we can add it next year.

In the meantime, best of luck with your campaigns over the next year.

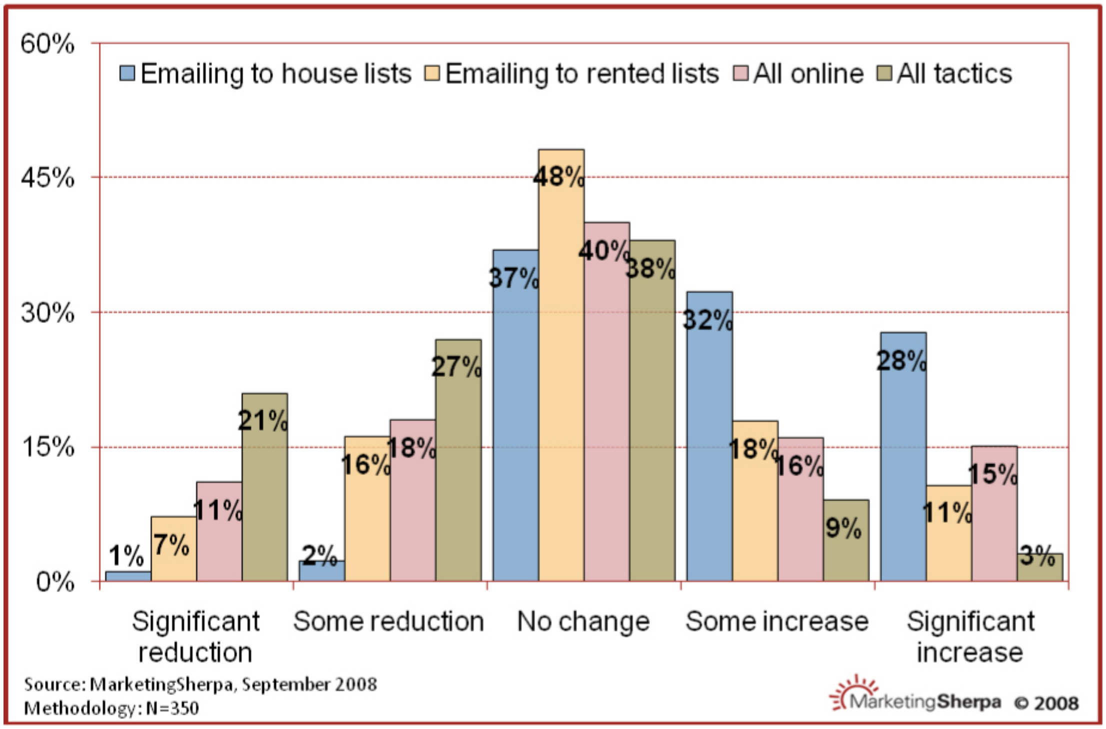


Stefan Tornquist
Research Director, MarketingSherpa LLC

Executive Summary

Highlight #1: A Down Economy Means More Email

Chart: The Economy and Email – B-to-B Budgets



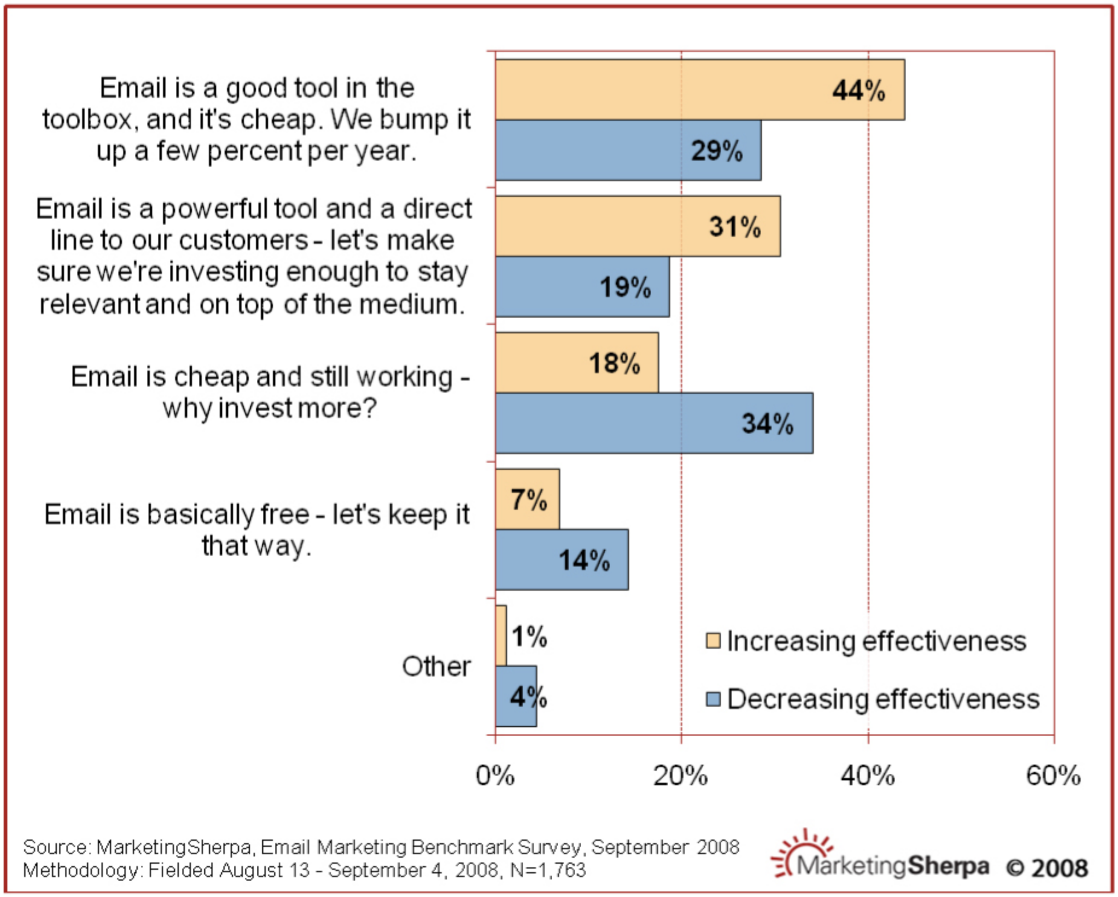
In a difficult economy, marketers of all types are turning back to email; they see it as the eye in the raging economic storm. Low cost, targeted, and able to move the needle with prospects as well as current customers, email is front and center among marketing tactics in the current downturn. More interesting than the optimism for house email, which was to be expected, are the positive numbers relating to third-party list rentals. 29% of B-to-B marketers plan on spending increases in this area, compared to 23% planning cuts. Over the last few years, the trend has been away from list rental, but it appears that the need for predictable customer acquisition may reverse that trend – at least for business marketers.

Pressure to meet numbers has always been a problem for email. It forces marketers to send too many emails to too many list members – the 'batch and blast' mentality that has eroded the trust of consumers and businessmen over the last 10 years. This enthusiasm for email in the downturn is going to mean greater competition at the inbox, and that's not necessarily good for the long-term health of the medium.

Those organizations that use email successfully throughout the downturn will be those that practice email responsibly and efficiently – through creativity, personalization, segmentation, testing and pristine list management.

Highlight #2: Attitude Toward Email Budgets Correlates with Performance

Chart: How Email is Viewed at Budget Time by Perception of Effectiveness

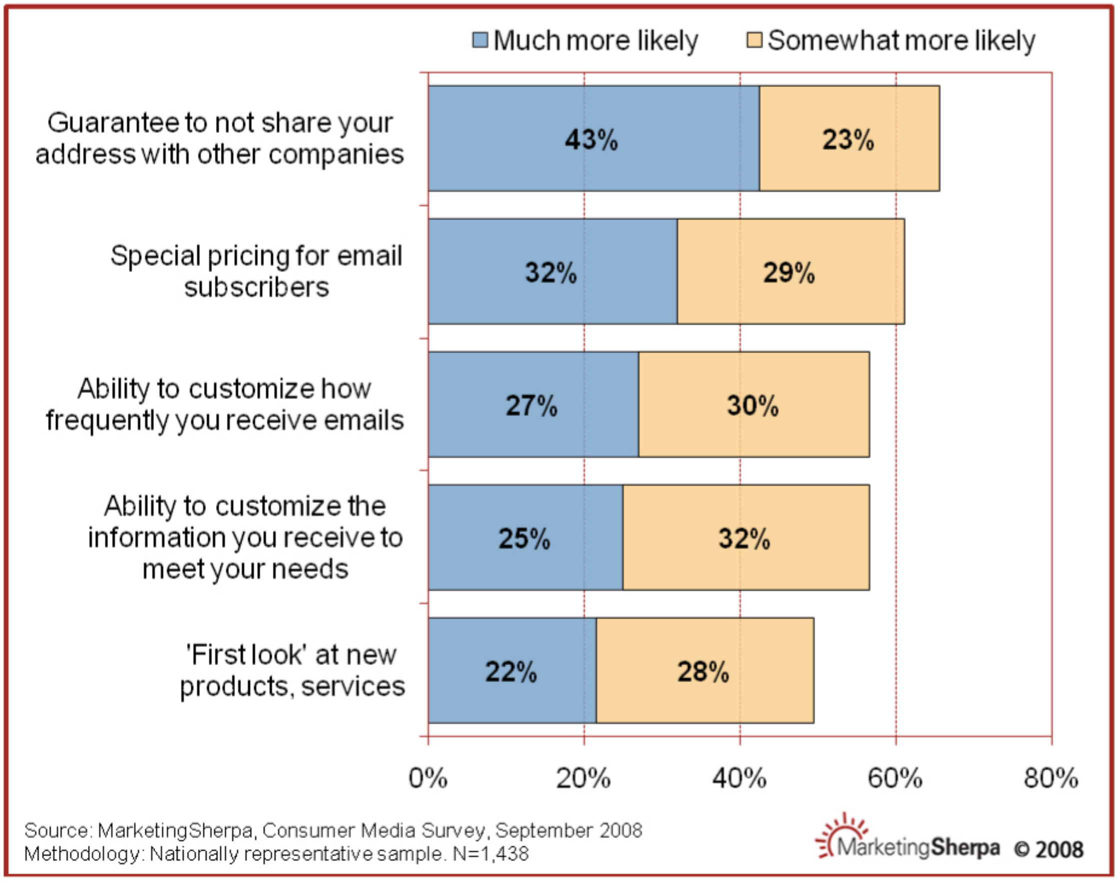


The chart above tracks the attitudes of marketing organizations toward email during the budget-making process. It's a 'temperature-taking' measure that we've used for several years to track whether email was gaining or losing respect as a medium. The results have generally been nuanced. In this example, we're looking at budget attitudes through the lens of how respondents see the impact of email changing over time for their organizations. So, for those that find its impact increasing (the majority), 75% of respondents fall into the top two categories – 'invest a bit more each year' or 'invest to stay on top' compared to 48% of those who see email's impact as decreasing.

Nearly half of this latter group describe their companies as having attitudes toward email that suggest a limited view on how it works, and why it works – as being ' cheap and working' or 'basically free.' It's not surprising, then, that these are the same organizations that don't anticipate a healthy, growing impact from email.

Highlight #3: To Increase Opt-ins, Offer Real Benefits

Chart: Raising Opt-Ins: Offer Benefits to Encourage Consumer Subscriptions



Consumers want more from email programs than they've been given. They want special treatment, and they deserve it; they're giving up their precious time in exchange for the 'benefit' of content – so that content should convey some real benefits. And though marketers bemoan the difficulties in gathering and retaining opt-in names, few go so far as to craft real retention programs for their email list members.

This chart should provide some inspiration. It records the opinions of more than 1,400 nationally representative consumers, and believe it or not, they want to opt in. But, they want something in exchange. It's interesting that, across the board, at least 50% of the sample would be at least somewhat more likely to subscribe if offered any of the benefits listed. The highest response is for email privacy, but special pricing and customization capabilities also rate very well. As we dig into the data, we also find that there are encouraging correlations between desirable demographics (young, affluent, educated people) and an increased willingness to opt in when these benefits are offered.

Highlight #4: You Can Overcome Image Blocking

Images & Heatmaps: Emails with Images On/Offs

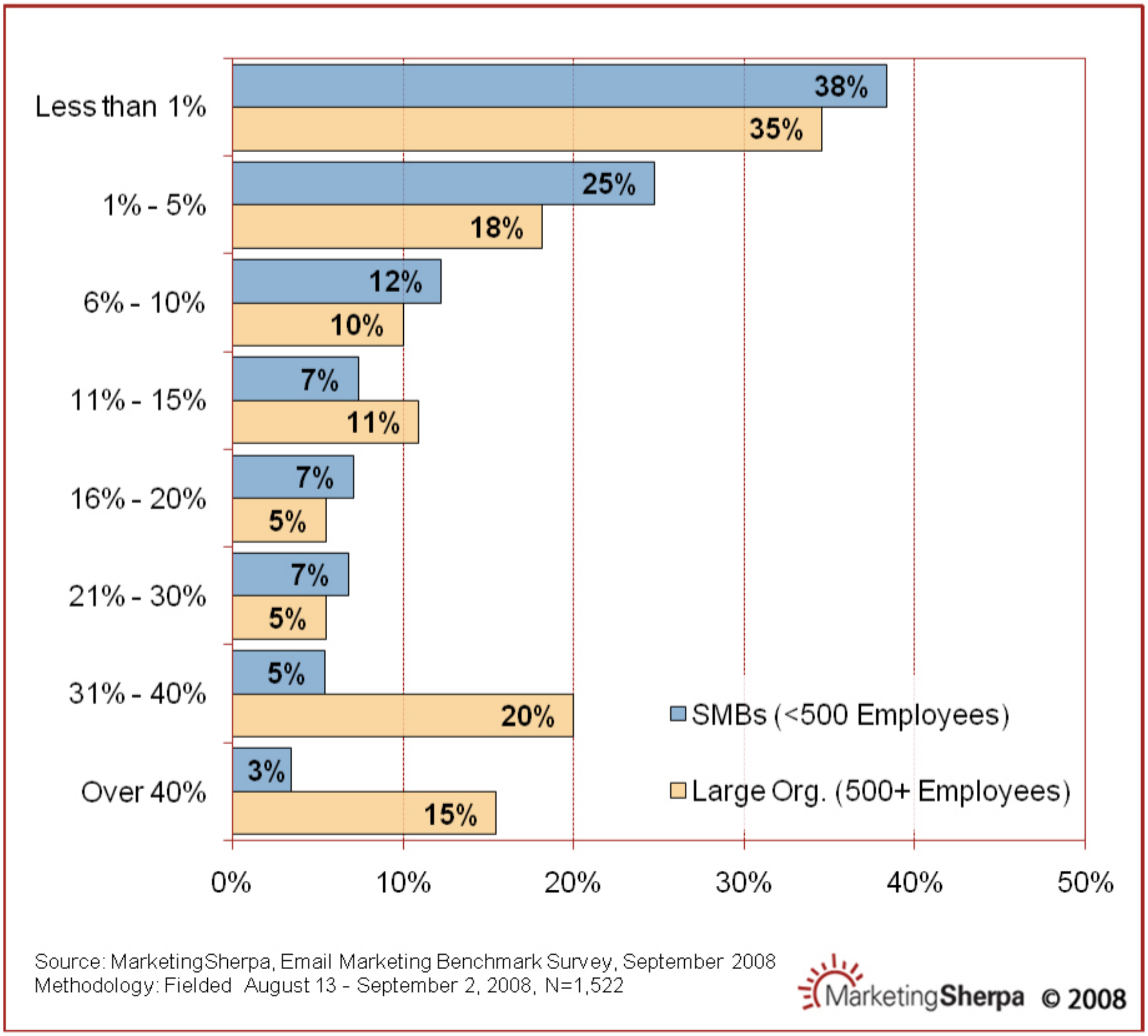
Most online marketing mediums have some technological challenges; cookies get deleted, windows are blocked and videos are stripped. But email has more than its fair share of tech-related hurdles. There's the constant struggle to improve delivery, having to fight for attention in the preview pane and image blocking which, at best, removes your creative and, at worst, completely distorts the email. This year's eyetracking study looked at a range of email design questions, but one we wanted to address was whether good email design could trump image blocking.

To an extent it can. The heatmaps above show the difference in readership for the same email with images on and off. The version with images did achieve somewhat greater attention and time spent on the page, but the difference wasn't huge. Even with images blocked, the good use of text, tables and alt text allow for strong attention to the blocked version.

In the version with blocked images, we also see a higher percentage reading the entire headline instead of scanning and skipping down, which appears to be related to the pull of the image below. When that image is removed, people spend a bit more time reading. That underscores the power and danger of compelling images – they can engage and attract the user's attention, but they may be stealing it from a key piece of content.

Highlight #5: Take Advantage of Overseas Opportunities

Chart: How Much of Your Email List is Overseas?



As the U.S. dollar has fallen over the last several years, there's been one bright spot – the growing appeal of American-made products. When energy and commodities are taken out of the equation, the U.S. has seen a surplus in trade of machined products, high-tech equipment and, most interestingly, professional services. The monetary imbalance has made it possible for European and Asian countries to outsource to the U.S., and this market should be of great interest to marketers with an online presence.

This chart tracks the percentage of emailers' lists located overseas, split by the size of the mailing organization. Not surprisingly, large companies have a much higher percentage of foreign subscribers in their email marketing databases than their smaller counterparts. But it's also true that large organizations are better at keeping track of such things. For this chart, we eliminated the understandably low 55% of smaller companies and surprisingly large 46% of large companies that 'didn't know' this figure.

For half of the large organizations that keep tabs on the percent of their email list located outside of North America, 15% are foreign addresses. An impressive 35% of these large organizations have email lists with more than 30% of the addresses located outside North America.

While not as populated with foreign addresses as large organization databases, 29% of small and mid-size businesses have email lists with more than 10% of the recipients located outside North America.

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- 198 Charts, 55 tables
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- All-new research from 1,763 email marketers

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