

At The Coalface

Email marketing and privacy: smart answers to deceptively simple questions.

Late last year a panel of speakers at a DMA Brainy Breakfast answered questions sent in in advance by members of the audience. The questions were surprisingly simple but were obviously what real people in real companies wanted to know about their email marketing.

We mixed some of the forum's panel members with a cross-section of the email marketing industry to further answer email marketing questions.

Can I email someone if I have their contact details for another purpose? For example, if a food manufacturer has someone's address who has opted in for more information about marmite, can they email them with information about peanut butter?

Most say a decisive 'no', and here's why:

Larkin: "Email is not an overly successful introductory tool. It demands a high level of familiarity." Larkin points out that the rules of traditional direct mail (which requires no permission at all) do not – currently – apply to email.



Roanne Parker

Meet the panel

Roanne Parker, marketing director, Jericho (www.jericho.co.nz)
 Lesley Pope, ceo, MessageMedia (www.messagemedia.co.nz)
 Chris Price, md, Permission NZ (www.permission.co.nz)
 Boyd Wason, strategy director, Tango Communications (www.tangocomms.co.nz)
 Sonia Slattery, md, Tango Communications
 Andrew Larkin, md, Emerge Agency (www.emerge.co.nz)
 Graeme McLennan, md, Cybernamix (www.ecatalog.co.nz)
 Anna Curnow, internet strategist, Webenz (www.minervamail.com)
 Lisa Harris, marketing automation manager, Orbiz (www.orbiz.biz)
 Debbie Mayo-Smith, emarketing consultant and author (www.successis.co.nz)
 Douglas Wilson, director, Benland/Wilson & Associates (www.benlandwilson.com)
 Steve Shearman, director, Touchpoint (www.touchpoint.co.nz)
 John McGlinchey, director, Traffic Directions (email traffiddirections@xtra.co.nz)

"Perhaps because it's easier to do a bad email than a bad direct mail."

Wilson: "If you had permission to enter a house as a plumber, you'd be trespassing if you came back as an electrician next day, saying you had general permission to enter."

Mayo-Smith ventures a "kind-of yes", depending on how close the two subjects are. "But," she warns, "this can 'burn' a list. You may get a lot more unsubscribes."

So what's a better way to introduce peanut butter to your marmite-loving readers?

According to Parker, it comes back to strategy, and asking questions about your brand, your product and your customers. "Are the products 'related'?" she asks. "If not, it may be best to

start a fresh list. It's a big leap to ask someone who wants potato chip information whether they also want to hear about tinned peas."

Shearman and Pope say it's important to segment your database so when someone unsubscribes from one list, they can still receive other email from you.

For McGlinchey, it's not a problem. "I would! If you have an email dialogue with the customer, you can ask, 'Would you like to receive information on this?' That's part of building a relationship with the customer."

How do I overcome recipients' apathy towards bulk email?

"Don't send it" is a nice and simple answer, but the reality is bulk email – or spam – is in the eye of the beholder.

Spam is email the recipient didn't ask for. But the difference between 'evil' spam – Nigerian scams etc – and 'good' spam – spam from innocent New Zea-

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land firms – is unclear.

Stand out from the crowd, say our panel, by using permission and relevance to full advantage.

Parker: “Keep your mailings anticipated, relevant and personal by offering information that has value to that customer.”

Price: “Try not to make it look like bulk. Target and personalise it as much as you can.”

Curnow: “Make sure [recipients] have control over what kind of email they’re receiving.”

Harris: “Know your audience and make sure they recognise who the email is from. Make sure it’s well written and has a good subject line which grabs attention.

“Be specific, don’t put too much information in one email. Don’t bombard people. Ask them how often they’d like to receive emails from you.”

Larkin: “[We overcome apathy] in the same way we do with successful surface mail – with compelling creative and concise copy. The old rules apply – but so do a few new ones. Email is only really effective if the receiver knows and trusts you.”

Pope: “As part of the overall marketing mix, brand look and feel must be the same as offline to build on the relationship you’re trying to grow.”

Mayo-Smith: “Build up loyalty by making it valuable, make it easy for them to go through and understand, and know how they use the internet.”

Slattery also warned against getting into a publishing rut: “Send it when it’s relevant rather than getting an email out just for the sake of it.”

In the US, legitimate marketing emails are being blocked by spam-filtering software; is this happening here and how can we stop it?

The consensus seems to be: it’s not happening much, but it will increase, and there’s not much we can do about it except build close relationships with customers and use multiple communication channels.



Lesley Pope



Andrew Larkin

McGlinchey says it’s a passing fad. Customers will accept there will always be irrelevant information. “Five percent of the newspaper is relevant to me. The rest I ignore and turn the pages. I change the television channel when it’s not relevant.

“It’s about market immaturity... get over it!”

How do I get to html recipients who don’t have web access?

There are three possible scenarios here:

- Recipients download email then dis-

connect, meaning they can’t view graphics within an email

■ Recipients in corporate settings have internal email but no internet access

■ Recipients have programs like Lotus Notes that distort incoming html email.

For customers of MessageMedia, SmartMail and Touchpoint (and likely most other products on the market), it’s simple: the software auto-senses

whether the recipient can receive html.

It can be even simpler. Curnow says just ask the user whether they’d prefer text or html.

Price goes one step further: just send them a text message. “Marketers get too hung up on formats whereas people are looking for words. It’s dialogue, personality and words – don’t worry about format. People need more personality behind their work.”

Parker disagrees: “Do you send a letter to your customer on plain paper?”

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However she does acknowledge that text, done well, is more personal. "Your friends don't send you html email, so text-only can foster a more 'intimate feel' in some circumstances."

Each audience is different; test yours. While Pope says some clients have 98% html recipients, Mayo-Smith recently found 88% of her list (business owners and managers) disconnected from the

load? Some emails have so many links that customers look at none of them. What's the optimum number of links? Does this differ by sector?

Parker: "Links have nothing to do with information overload. If you're pregnant for the first time, you can't get enough information. Relevance."

Price agrees: "If it's information over-

Is there an optimum number of links? Pope and Mayo-Smith don't think so, but McGlinchey quotes from an overseas survey that you should aim for one to five links, and make your email readable within 40 seconds.

Shearman: "If you want a response, have just one thing for the customer to do."

Do email newsletters and e-zines have a lifecycle in the way that print magazines do?

Although email is a new medium, people still get bored easily. Wason says don't worry, it's too early in the medium's life for the 'death' part of the lifecycle. Keep it relevant and you'll get it right.

Email makes relevance easier – you can track recipient behaviour, and a subscriber can give feedback at the click of a button.

What are the best software products to use for email marketing and why?

Instead of peddling their wares, the main product players (Touchpoint, MessageMedia, SmartMail, Emerge and Minervamail) gave some thought-provoking lists of things to look for.

Shearman: "Use a server-based product rather than a desktop product. A server-based product gives tracking, click reporting, and helps customers manage permission."

Pope: "The best software product comes down to what your needs are – and your long-term needs. It's critical to ensure any software you take on board grows with you."

Boyd Wason



Sonia Slattery



internet after checking email – even those on high-speed connections. (More at <http://www.successis.co.nz/survey/results.htm>)

McLennan questions whether these customers should even be targeted by email. "We're looking for web surfers through this channel. If your customer switches off after accessing mail, how long are they spending on the web? You might have to look at telemarketing to 5% of your database."

How do you limit information over-

load, you don't know enough about your target audience. You need to learn more about your subscribers."

Pope says increase relevance by tracking which links are popular and changing your content accordingly.

Larkin: "Define the exact intention of your message. Who is it to, and what does it really want to achieve? Slavishly follow that direction."

Wilson: "Make each email as short as possible. Use intros to stories with links, so the reader can quickly select content they're interested in."

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Parker: "It's about making sure the tool and the team behind it can deliver what you need. It is rocket science and you need to leave the expertise to the experts."

Larkin: "The software package itself is arbitrary. It's like asking what sort of print press to use? The key success factor is compelling creative and expert layout/database skills."

Curnow: "Look for ease of use and control for the user... the ability to build your own database, and reporting – as long as it's understandable."

Price: "Understand what you want to achieve first and then find the right source."

Harris: "Make sure whatever solution you get integrates with your other relationship marketing software. Start small and grow."

Mayo-Smith: "I use and highly recommend Gravitymail, sending out emails with a web-based services. There's also Worldmerge which sends personalised emails from your desktop."

Wilson: "Look for the ability to load databases from various standard database software... to personalise and customise the email... the ability to automatically handle mailing list updates – subscribes, unsubscribes and bounces... and the ability to send email in text, html, or both (Mime Multi-Part)."

How can you make money from email?

Almost everyone pointed out the cost savings of email marketing compared to print. But Wason warns if you're after cheap marketing, you're barking up the wrong tree. "Instead, think of how to use [email] to help other channels and make all of your communications effective."

Not to say that email isn't cost-effective. Mayo-Smith gets 95% of her seminar bookings from email.

A Touchpoint B2B client used telemarketing and direct mail successfully, but when they introduced email into the mix, the prospect could receive the information pack immediately.

What are the restrictions regarding passing email addresses to third parties? (Eg a company passing email

addresses on to its research company.)

Absolutely everyone said don't do it. If you need to do research, make the message come from your address – the identity and brand your customer has come to trust. And don't even think of selling or renting your customers email addresses.

Not that there's a law against it. Just guidelines created by the industry to avoid strict government measures, the kind which are keeping US marketers up at night. See the DMA's emarketing code of practice at www.emarketingcouncil.co.nz under "Standards and Guidelines".

Will email marketing replace or complement traditional DM?

Agreement all around on this one: both. In some cases email will replace direct mail, while in others it will just enhance it.

Is it okay to email someone I've never done business with previously?

It depends. A personal, one-to-one email is fine. But if you want to send the same message to multiple recipients, even a personalised message, you may get funny looks.

Larkin: "Email is not an effective introduction tool. It requires an unusual amount of familiarity to work effectively."

The best way to build an email database is for customers to fill in their email address on a website. Point of sale is another effective way, as Whitcoulls, Unichem and others have demonstrated.

Price recommends phoning and asking for permission. Slattery agrees, adding, "We've found that the error rate of telemarketing email addresses is usually around 10%, so try and build in some form of self-completion as well."

One thing's for sure: email marketing is relationships. It's all about relating closely with your customers and finding partners and products who fit your marketing strategy.

Simon Young is author of "Getting the words right for your web and email strategy", a free report downloadable from www.simonyoung.co.nz



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