

New Realities for E-Mail Marketing

By Lee Traupel

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Spam e-mail is no longer the mild irritant it once was – it's clogging corporate networks and ISP mail servers and has become a real productivity drain, forcing corporate and consumer e-mail users to spend 20-30 minutes a day dealing with this deluge of junk! According to recent figures, unsolicited bulk e-mail now makes up to 36% of all e-mail, up from under 8% just over a year ago. And, what's worse, more and more legitimate e-mail is not getting through to recipients due to Spam filtering taking place via ISPs and/or corporate networks.

Opt-in E-Mail Marketing 30K foot Picture

Opt-in e-mail marketing is clearly losing some of its effectiveness as a viable marketing tool much to the consternation of those of us who have been advocating its effectiveness for years! This is not to say opt-in e-mail isn't a viable way to market goods and services – but ROI (read response rates) is heading south quickly and needs to be considered when assessing the viability of this marketing process, as response rates have dropped on average from 10-20% to 3-10%.

However, opt-in e-mail is not disappearing off the marketing horizons – Forrester forecasts spending on e-mail marketing will grow from \$1.3B (USD) in 2001 to \$6.8B in 2006 and Jupiter Media Metrix is even more optimistic, forecasting growth rates from \$1B in 2001 to \$9.4B in 2006. But, there is a dark undercurrent to these numbers that is fueling the market growth and driving down response rates – some opt-in agencies, brokers and media representatives are “flogging” lists by overselling them – so caveat emptor.

Five Offsetting Marketing Strategies

1) Deploy opt-in e-mail campaigns very selectively (!) - buy opt-in e-mail lists from legitimate top-tier broker/list managers who are well established, are not “over-sending” messages to list subscribers and who are constantly refreshing their list quality by adding new subscribers. Critical questions to ask brokers include: how many messages (“frequency” in ad speak) are sent to each list recipient per month, how are new subscribers added and what is the percentage of new members added per month, are they using “third party” (someone else's list) lists to augment their own, are their lists “double opt in” (meaning, you sign up and then must reply to a signup confirmation to be added to a list) and last but not least, what is their privacy policy and how strictly do they adhere to published industry standards.

2) Utilize plain vanilla text link advertising – find web sites or portals that have traffic that is comprised of customers who are in your market segment. Then, add a text link (banner ad or graphic button if you will) to a page or pages and negotiate a media buy that is based upon a “cost per click” basis; i.e. paying only for traffic that clicks through to your web site.

3) Creating and deploying a “link strategy” campaign (i.e. getting a site listed via other web sites) is one of the best self-sustaining interactive marketing processes available to any company seeking to drive qualified traffic to a web site. This process is not based upon the more traditional “reciprocal links” procedure but incorporates some web-based competitive analysis. You start by analyzing the links that are pointing back to your top 3-5 competitors’ web sites and then establish relationships with these sites and also submit your site to top and second tier directories to augment the number of links.

4) Newsletter insert advertising used to be considered rather mundane and not very effective. But, if you contrast the effectiveness of this process versus the new opt-in e-mail response rates the heretofore-lowly newsletter advertising has new and vastly improved luster! Also, in the past it was difficult to track when and if people clicked on a text link ad in a newsletter - but new technology enables virtually any publisher to provide you with this information, enabling you to track your ROI for the media buy. Finally, the real beauty of newsletter text advertising is that it is very targeted and people want to receive the information so you can be confident your ad will at least be viewed by some finite number of prospects.

5) Search Engine Ranking has come of age in the last 12-24 months – you can now easily create and deploy a traditional (title, description, keywords inserts in content, submissions and optimization) search engine ranking process that is augmented with a pay per click (“PPC”) process. Deploying both ensures you derive long term (traditional rankings) and short term (pay per click) results, with the latter being driven by the amount of funds you have in your marketing budget.

Lee Traupel has 20 plus years of marketing experience - he is the founder of Intelective Communications, Inc. <http://www.intelective.com> , a marketing services company which provides strategic and tactical marketing services exclusively to small to medium sized companies. Lee@intelective.com Reprinted with permission from Intelective Communications - this article may be reprinted freely, provided this attribution box remains intact. (c) 2001-2002 by Intelective Communications, Inc.

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