



The Evolving Role of Email Marketing

2015 and Beyond!

As smartphones have become increasingly common and many—particularly the millennial generation—have turned to texting as their go-to method of communication, some have questioned the future of email as a means of communication in personal and professional settings.

Will email go away? Will it remain relevant? These are very much the same questions that have been asked of other forms of communication: Will email replace “snail mail?” Will online chat replace phone calls? “Yes” and “yes” in some cases, but certainly not in all. In fact, industry experts and marketing practitioners point to a number of reasons that email is likely to remain a very viable element in any marketer’s toolkit—along with strategies and tips for using this tool most effectively.

Email Still Matters: To Marketers, and Consumers!

Even in an increasingly mobile environment, email remains a viable option, according to research done by Yesmail, which was reported in their [Email Marketing Compass report](#).

Mobile-driven conversions are up 70 percent year-over-year from the fourth quarter of 2013 to the fourth quarter of 2014. The growth in sales driven through mobile has been significant, and email can certainly play a part in that.

Makenzi Lindamood, marketing manager for [Stirista, LLC](#), a marketing firm headquartered in San Antonio, with offices in Kenya and India, points to a 2014 Econsultancy article that also showed an increase in sales from email marketing—23 percent in 2014, compared to just 18 percent in 2013. Email marketing, she predicts, “will continue to increase as companies find it’s still relevant and has excellent ROI.”

“I would go so far as to say that classic adage: ‘what’s old is new again,’” says Colin Darretta, founder and CEO of [WellPath Solutions](#), a company that sells customized nutritional solutions. For himself and for other CEOs in start-up firms, he says, email is proving to be a very effective method of customer acquisition. “You have the ability to talk, unencumbered, directly to your target customer—provided you have a good email list,” Darretta says. Of course, those discussions—and any resulting sales—will never happen if your email isn’t opened! That’s a foundational “must have” that is often overlooked—or not considered carefully enough—by many marketers.

Strategic Targeting and Segmentation

Like any marketing endeavor, email marketing should begin with a well-formulated strategy. Unfortunately, that’s a step that is often overlooked. Jennifer Garcia, partner and CEO with [Red Bamboo Marketing](#) in Red Bank, New Jersey, says marketers need to be clear about their overall goal of using of email marketing, and they need to develop a strategy to support that goal. “The strategy is the *how* you are going to reach your goal,” she points out. “It needs to be pretty specific, including who, what, when, where and how.”

In addition, Garcia says, marketers can be more successful attracting the attention of their audiences by using segmentation. “Make sure that you look at your database, and segment it appropriately so you can target different segments a little bit differently,” she suggests. That’s important to help create messaging that will gain the audience’s attention—and action. Christopher Fox, Ph.D., managing partner with [Syncrexis, LLC](#), a healthcare marketing consultancy based in Los Angeles, agrees. “In most cases, email lists are still under-segmented,” he says. “In other words, you are sending emails that are not targeted precisely enough.

Recipients don’t find your emails relevant to their needs or interests.” Making the effort to target more specifically will pay dividends, Fox says, and there are many tools that can help marketers do that based on attributes like gender, age, location, past buying behavior, etc.

“Email platforms such as [intercom.io](#) or [customer.io](#) have enabled SaaS owners and bloggers like me to target users based on what they have done on my website and in my SaaS tool,” says Sean Si, CEO and founder of [SEO Hacker](#). These tools, unlike those such as AWeber or MailChimp,

represent a “huge leap” because they allow targeting based on behavior. “Behavioral targeting is the best thing that has ever happened to email marketing,” Si says.

“If you’re still sending your entire subscription list the same content without any attempt to segment your lists or tailor your message, you’re going to find yourself behind the times at the end of 2015,” says Marissa Mendel, who leads email marketing services at [thunder:tech](#), an integrated marketing firm based in Cleveland.

“As consumers get bombarded with more marketing messages every day from digital media, email marketers need to keep all messages as relevant and engaging as possible these days,” says Mendel. “Segmenting subscribers by interest, purchase history, location or other factors is a great way to increase the chance that users will open and click a brand’s email content.”

Additionally, says Mendel, marketers should be using email marketing software that allows them to elevate their campaigns as their lists grow, whether through segmentation, automation or other tactics. “We like to encourage brands to A/B test one factor in every email they send, so we’re always gathering new data and understanding the target audience a little more each time,” she says.

As experts attest, email, done right, can still resonate—at a fraction of the cost of traditional marketing efforts. Next up: best practices for cutting through the clutter and resonating with your audiences.

Despite rumblings to the contrary, email marketing still has a place in any marketer’s arsenal—in both the B2B and B2C arenas—but the landscape is cluttered with a growing number of marketers attempting to connect with their target audiences online. What do you need to know to stand out from the crowd and boost the odds that your email will not only reach its intended recipient, but also get opened—and prompt action?

Some advice from the pros:

Spend Time on the Subject Line

The trick to getting people to read your email is to first get them to open it, says Ken Wisnefski, CEO of [WebiMax](#), an Internet marketing firm headquartered in Camden, New Jersey. Think of your own email habits. Do you, as Wisnefski suggests, prioritize your email inbox based on these categories: family, then friends, then coworkers, then everyone else (a category that includes marketers)?

If you’re in that “everyone else” category, says Wisnefski, you have “about four to six words to impress people enough to click on your email.”

“Sometimes a brief glance at a subject line is all you will get,” he says. It’s important to make that brief glance impactful. Two great elements to include in your subject line are humor and urgency, says Wisnefski. That can be tough for some, he admits. “Barring those elements, you have to suppose that your recipients have been looking for what you are marketing at one time or another, and it’s up to you to remind them. This requires you to have faith in the quality of your lead gathering operation.”

That’s a good point and stresses an important factor for most email marketers. You’re communicating with people who you, in many cases, already have a connection with, and that can work to your advantage.

Building Engagement to Maintain Audience

Toni Schmidt, marketing coordinator with [Purple Gator](#), an interactive marketing firm based in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, says that email marketing is effective primarily because of the level of engagement of those consumers who opt-in to marketers’ lists. “By now, most business owners realize that building relationships is the key to building a successful business,” she says. Email can help them do that.

“Getting personal on email and humanizing their brands is essential in any email marketing campaign in order to stand out in this noisy world,” says Schmidt. One great way to do that is through video. “Video is the single most important thing a business owner can do in their email marketing campaign to stand out.”

But, warn some, marketers also must be careful to not irritate their audiences by communicating too much, too frequently. [Phil Simon](#), author of [Message Not Received: Why Business Communication is Broken and How to Fix It](#) (Wiley, 2015), is a management and technology expert. Before sending an email, he suggests, marketers need to consider if it will do more harm than good. “You may sign up a new customer, but will you alienate five in the process?” Simon points to [a study by The Radicati Group](#) that reported employees receive and send an average of 121 business messages every day. “That means that employees are receiving emails about once every four minutes,” he says. “People are overwhelmed. It turns out that email overload is the single biggest reason that people unsubscribe from mailing lists. Yes, there is such a thing as ‘too much communication.’”

Making it Personal

Of course, because email is personal, it needs to *be* personal. With today’s technology, there is no excuse to get critical facts about your email recipients wrong.

Because people are so busy and inundated with email both within and outside office settings, marketers need to work hard to KISS – keep it short and simple! Many marketers, notes Simon, are far too enamored of their own language—the inside speak that those on the outside may not understand. “Your company has developed a ‘next generation cross-platform communications app?’ I’m sure this is exciting internally, but most of your prospects don’t even know what a ‘next generation cross-platform communications app’ is,” says Simon. “Simplicity in language has never been more essential.”

The point that many marketers miss, says Tim Riesterer, “is that the technology they use is only as good as the messaging that lives inside it.” Riesterer is chief strategy and marketing officer with [Corporate Visions](#), a marketing and sales messaging firm based in Larkspur, California.

Riesterer is big on “visual storytelling” and says, “research has proven that visuals are recalled six times better than words alone.” Text-only email marketing campaigns, he says, just don’t resonate as well as campaigns that make connections in visual ways. “So, if you’re using text-only email marketing campaigns, it’s time to change your strategy,” he says.

And, importantly, make sure that strategy is focused on relationship-building, not sales pitches. “Consumers are on alert now more than ever for sales pitches in their email boxes,” warns Lindamood. “You have to personalize their experience and reach them on a different level than just a sales pitch.” An easy way to do this is simply by using the recipient’s name, she says. But, she adds, “You can also personalize by using dynamic content that adjusts according to behavioral or geographic data.”

Adam Jwaskiewicz, director of interactive services at [Pinckney Hugo Group](#), a marketing communications firm in Syracuse, New York, stresses the importance of testing. After all, it is so easy to do in this digital age that it doesn’t make sense not to! “Use A/B testing to maximize the effectiveness of your email,” he advises. “For example, distribute the same email to a test group, but use two different subject lines. When sending the actual email, use the subject line that performed best. This helps make decisions on actual data, not just your gut feeling.” Third-party platforms like [Litmus](#), he notes, allow marketers to test emails on various email programs before even sending the message, which helps users ensure the design and content appears correctly in all programs.

The results of your testing will allow you to discover your own best practices as you work to continually improve your email marketing efforts—and the results they generate!

A Look to the Future

One thing certain about online marketing, including email marketing, is that things are always changing. Marketers are continually looking for newer and better ways to stand out from the masses, and technology continues to deliver. Those who have solid expertise in email marketing point to a number of best practices that they have found lead to higher engagement and better results.

Tynicka Battle, founder and CEO of [Tynicka Battle Digital](#), a digital marketing agency in Princeton, New Jersey, points to the following as email must-haves for 2015 and beyond:

- Responsive design, which she says will be standard for all mobile devices
- An increase in automated content like cart abandonment and customer surveys
- Smarter contests and ads to compensate for list attrition
- Encouraging consumers to increase social sharing through email
- Reciprocal support with/to social media platforms

Going beyond the basics, David Erickson, VP of online marketing with [Karwoski & Courage](#), a PR firm based in Minneapolis, points to some “sophisticated things I think marketers need to be paying attention to:”

- **Testing.** Most email marketing systems now have some form of basic A/B testing built in. Take advantage of these tools to optimize your efforts by testing send times, sender email addresses and subject lines
- **Click Maps.** A surefire metric for engagement is click-through rate. Go beyond the numbers by looking at your click-maps to see where those clicks are distributed. Are people more likely to click on the phrase "Read More" or "Learn More?"
- **Site Traffic.** If you're linking from your emails to your website, ensure you are tagging those links so they can be properly tracked through your website analytics service in order to understand if people are engaging with your content or converting into sales or other metrics that are important to you. Configure your analytics to identify newsletter subscribers at signup so you can track their on-site behavior over time and understand how newsletter subscribers behave versus those who have not subscribed.
- **Segmentation.** Segment your email list to ensure you are sending the most relevant content to the most receptive audiences. You can segment by demographics, purchase history, content history or any manner of factors. Use segments, for example, to try and activate dormant subscribers.
- **Retargeting.** Use auto-responder emails to target list members based on pages they visit or cart abandonments.
- **Ask To Share.** Don't assume the “Forward To A Friend” option in your email system will do the trick. Those buttons suffer from “button blindness.” Ask your subscribers explicitly to share your newsletter or email with their family, friends, and colleagues who they think may be interested.

- **Nurturing.** Think of how you can create a logical series of timed emails based on the customer/prospect's initial interaction with you that progressively provides the subscriber greater value with each successive email and leads to conversion call-to-action.

The future is bright for email marketers who can leverage the proliferation of mobile devices, along with contextual marketing platforms, says Blaise Lucey, content marketing manager for [Moveable Ink](#), a New York City-based startup. “We’re living in a mobile-first world,” says Lucey. “Marketers have to think about responsive design in a new way. Mobile emails should not only respond to what the device needs, but what the customer needs in that moment. That means creating emails that can react to weather, location, time of open, and more—all in real time.”

Email marketing in 2015 is as important as it has ever been, agrees Sancar Sahin, head of content marketing with [GetApp](#), a “cloud apps marketplace” based in Barcelona, Spain. “However, as marketers we need to accept that our consumers are more savvy to blatant attempts to get them onto our lists and engaging with our content,” he says. Now is the time, he says, “to think seriously about what our consumers want, how often they want it, and in what format. In summary, 2015 is the year to listen to the people who consume our content.”

Additional Tips:

“As marketers, we have to always focus on building real business value through all channels, and email marketing is no exception. Delivering relevant messages and creating value for recipients remains a constant strategy, and, in 2015, mobile compatibility is more important than ever. Proper formatting should be factored into a marketing strategy to successfully reach the ever growing mobile audience. Last, but not least, opportunities abound to add marketing automation to the mix, ensuring that your message hits the target consumer, with the right information, at the ideal time. Nurturing leads through the sales funnel is an opportunity for success that applies to all marketing strategies in today's world.”

Ashley Prewitt
Manager
[Intermark Group Small Business Division](#)

“The methods of how we reach people are sophisticated, and those people maybe as well, but you still need to connect to them. There is still that ‘human’ element to marketing that drives what we do. If you remember from elementary school, ‘keep it simple stupid.’ Don’t try so hard to come across as anything but who you are. If you make your emails personal and to the point,

no matter how you send them, people will be way more receptive. What would you want to read in the email you send? What is their pain point? Take that perspective before you write and send anything. Then when you do write an email, keep it professional but also personable. When you do that, it doesn't matter how sophisticated the technology or people are.”

Ian St. Clair
Content Manager
[Clicks and Clients](#)

“The most successful digital marketers leverage highly-targeted, timely, and personalized email communications to attract, nurture, and convert their ideal customers. Scheduled email newsletters and sales promotions are no longer an effective approach to email marketing. Savvy marketers are leveraging marketing automation to deliver the right message at the ideal time. Marketers must first think through all of the ways in which a potential customer interacts with their brand and then develop relevant email content specific to those interactions.”

Brandi Starr
President & Marketing Strategist
[Cassius Blue Consulting](#)

“E-mail marketing in 2015 is about maintaining a story narrative with your customer base. It is important to personalize the email experience based on customer behavior and experience. Content always needs to be targeted and relevant to a person's likes and wants. If you expect them to click and engage your marketing efforts, make sure that you segment properly so that what you are sending out will hold individualized interest. Technology is the key to properly running your email marketing efforts in 2015.”

Matthew Reischer, Esq.
Marketing VP
[Legal Marketing Pages Corp.](#)

“Rather than mass emailing, subscriber groups are segmented by demographic, behavior and/or geography to make them more relevant and to recipients. Additionally, a newer SEM technique, Gmail Sponsored Promotions (GSPs), targets online users via email advertisements rather than web searches. Bidding with other companies for key words may place your brand's website on the first page of search results, yet GSP can place your banner and/or link directly into a target consumers email account. Differentiating opportunities are endless.”

Leora Lanz and Sachin Suri
[Prognosis Digital](#)

“Email will always be part of the digital marketing mix. But, with higher expectations from consumers, marketers need to rise to meet and then exceed them. Messages that are relevant to and benefit the recipient rather than the sender will always appeal more to even the most fastidious consumer. Think of the inbox as a place to which you have been invited and then earn the right to stay; send conscious and thoughtful (read: targeted) messages from a place of benefiting the recipient, regardless of immediate sale potential. The same way a meaningful letter stands out among a slew of worthless communications in a physical mailbox, a thoughtful email will rise above and resonate. But when you blend in with the junk, that delete button is only a click away, and your name is easiest to forget when decision time comes around.

“Even in the age where consumers are smarter and more careful about whether or not to engage with messages and how they choose to do so, marketers can learn from and leverage that information. ABT - Always Be Testing. Try new things, measure results, and use hard data when comparing it to standard messaging performance. The more you invest in learning about your audience, the more that will pay off in the form of increased engagement and, eventually, sales.”

Lauren Pettiglio
Marketing Campaign Manager
[Brainshark, Inc.](#)

“Marketers need to know that email marketing personalization—based on wealth, lifestyle factors and interests—is not only what is going to get consumer’s attention as their email content becomes more customized across segments. Personalization is what is going to ensure they maintain their share of attention in a noisy marketplace.”

Jessica Smith
Sr. Manager of Product Marketing
[WealthEngine](#)

“Marketers need to know several things about email marketing in 2015, but the most important aspect is value. Consumers have grown accustomed to email marketing as a platform, as most people have hundreds of subscriptions that pour into their inbox's daily. If a brand/company is not providing value, consumers will be quick to hit the unsubscribe button. Your email marketing should be solely focused on providing your audience with valuable resources.”

Justin Kerby
Co-founder
[Cave Social](#)

“In 2015, technology has enabled marketers to deliver what segments of, and even individual, customers, want through the use of email service providers and automation platforms. While these tools are powerful, it is still up to the human element, the marketers themselves, to determine what and how to fill them. This is possible by testing to learn what customers and prospects really want, creating content and promotions to meet their needs, and by establishing a process that will continue to meet these needs.”

Daniel Burstein
Director of Editorial Content
[MarketingSherpa](#)

“A lot of the older concepts in email marketing have evolved as user tastes have evolved. For instance, we used to think that the best time to email was Tuesday through Thursday before 9am. But people have now been conditioned to "clear their morning emails without giving it a thought. New technologies allow marketers to go beyond the basics and provide a more personalized and relevant experience, such as timing the email blast to the likely times one might open, consider, and click.”

David Scott
Author, [The New Rules of Lead Generation](#)
[Scott On Marketing](#)

“Marketers need to understand the crucial role that email marketing plays in the buyer journey. The marketing and sales funnel is no longer finite and is less predictable, so we need to use tools to help automate processes and nurture prospects more than ever. Email marketing is the lynch pin to moving prospects through each buyer sale – top of funnel to mid funnel, mid to bottom, and bottom to close. It’s important to automate steps and use email as the glue that moves prospects along in a personalized way.”

Todd Mumford
Founder/CEO
[Riverbed Marketing, Inc.](#)

“Email will continue to have the highest ROI of any digital marketing channel. 2015 marks 37 years since the first commercial email, but despite the lack of headlines, innovation still continues in this space. Email is adapting to, and is energized by, the mobile macro-trend. It is becoming more dynamic, using device type and recipient location, and more personalized, based on past user behavior and enriched demographic data. Marketers must not overlook the importance of email as a key, if not central, part of their marketing strategy. Email may be heading towards middle age, but it's still the marketing breadwinner after almost 40 years.”

Tony D’Anna, CEO
[PostUp](#)

“Personalization, which goes much farther than ‘Dear <Customer Name>,’ will be key for the future of email marketing. According to Gartner Inc., companies that have fully committed to personalization will outsell companies that haven’t by 20 percent. In order to provide a truly personalized experience, marketers are going to have to look farther than the standard frequency, monetary, recency, and value framework. The next five years will about marketers tailoring each message to customers by leveraging omnichannel behaviors, harnessing the power of predictive intelligence, focusing on the consumer’s interest, and understanding the context in which the user interacts with a brand’s email; for instance, given conversion is stronger on desktops, you might deploy promotional email only when the user is likely to be on desktop vs. mobile device.

“Responsive design, which ensures your site and email render well regardless of the screen size or device, is just the beginning; it’s important to tailor your email, content, offers and delivery strategy to mobile consumption trends.”

Cassie Lancellotti-Young
EVP of Customer Service
[Sailthru](#)

We hope you’ve enjoyed the expert insights from email marketers in a variety of industries. Let’s keep the conversation going!

**How are you using email as part of your marketing communication mix?
What best practices have resonated with your target audiences?**

[Let us know.](#)