

# Tips for making your e-mail campaign a success

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**SHIRLEY LICHTI**

In the early days of e-mail marketing, most companies saw it as a faster, better, cheaper alternative to direct mail.

It was fast, whereas direct mail campaigns took at least six weeks. Since it had higher response rates, it was perceived as better. And it was much cheaper because it involved no costs for printing, paper or postage.

Today, however, things are no longer so straightforward.

"E-mail marketing looks easier than it is," says Geoff Linton, vice-president of Inbox Marketer in Guelph.

E-mail campaigns have become more onerous, he notes, because of rules for deliverability, image blocking and spam filtering that change on a daily basis.

Inbox ([www.inboxmarketer.com](http://www.inboxmarketer.com)) traces its origins to MetaMail, a Richmond Hill e-mail software company. Realizing customers were more interested in using its services than purchasing the firm's software, MetaMail spun off Inbox Marketer to focus on e-mail solutions designed to strengthen client relationships.

Most marketers love e-mail because it's measurable. They can easily determine open rates (how many recipients open a message), also if e-mails are forwarded and if recipients click on links.

But Linton notes e-mail campaigns have progressed beyond such top of the line metrics as list size (how many people the e-mail goes to) and open rates, and are now more focused on bottom-line metrics such as transactions.

Deliverability is challenging. Linton cites industry statistics that show only 75 per cent of e-mail gets delivered directly to someone's inbox. About 15 per cent goes missing and 10 per cent ends up in a junk mail box. The best e-mail marketers get a deliverability rate of over 90 per cent.

When Linton started in the industry, tracking deliverability, open rates and click-through rates on links was expensive.

Today, he says, firms such as Constant Contact or Got Corporation provide such services for as little as \$15 per month for small lists.

While Inbox offers this type of tracking, it focuses on its value-added services. For example, it helps clients to increase deliverability or benchmark their e-mail campaigns against industry standards. Comparing your program with others may show that while your open rates are good, click-through rates are low.

Linton says Inbox can analyze a client's e-mail template to determine if it is too long, too cluttered, or contains too many links -- a red flag for filters. The company also offers testing for subject lines, body copy, visual elements and for eye-tracking (the path a person's eyes follow when reading).

For marketers, the three biggest e-mail challenges remain to a) get delivered to the inbox, b) get opened and c) get a click or some other measurable response, such as a phone call.

Still, Linton believes that done well, "e-mail is relationship marketing on steroids."

Whether you are a neophyte or a seasoned marketing veteran, when it comes to running an e-mail campaign, you can raise your chances of success by paying attention to the following tips:

Personalize your e-mail -- This may be as simple as ensuring the "TO" and "FROM" fields reflect the received and sender. Including both the

first and last name of the recipient, for example, increases the odds it will be opened and read.

Subject line is key -- If your subject line is not attention grabbing, or sounds like spam, chances are your e-mail will not get opened. Keep it straightforward and short -- seven words maximum.

Research shows that including a person's first name in the subject line lifts response. Linton was skeptical, but says the company tested it with financial services, telecommunications and pharmaceutical companies and found that it increased open rates from 25 per cent to 28 per cent.

Preview pane pain -- Your most important message needs to fall above the preview pane cut-off -- that is, within the part of the e-mail message you can read without actually opening it.

Linton says click-through decreases by 50 per cent on every page you have to scroll, so staying "above the fold" and in the preview pane, is key.

To determine the preview pane area, print out an e-mail and measure five centimetres down from the top. That's all most recipients see of your unopened e-mail, so ensure it includes marketing content, not just your logo.

Test, test, test -- Divide your list and test two different subject lines to determine which has higher open rates. Your copy and visuals can also be tested this way. Links in e-mails must be tested to ensure they work.

To see what your e-mail looks like when images are blocked, turn off your Internet connection and print the message.

Comply with CAN-SPAM -- Be sure to only send e-mail to people who subscribe. Always include a link to your privacy policy and an option to unsubscribe. If you use a "forward to a friend" link, remember that

you can only add these names to your list if they subscribe. Can-Spam is the U.S. Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography And Marketing Act of 2003

Always measure -- The cost to measure e-mail has never been more affordable. Tracking open rates and click-through rates can provide valuable information to improve future campaigns.

Shirley Lichti is a partner with Marketing Magic in Waterloo. Send suggestions for this column to her by phone at 745-0247 or by e-mail to [slichti@marketingmagic.ca](mailto:slichti@marketingmagic.ca)