

Study Reveals Email Marketing Best Practices for 2016

by Mary Shaw

SendGrid, the leading delivery platform for customer communication, revealed the results of a study analyzing consumer behavior during Black Friday and Cyber Monday 2015. The data was collected between November 1 and December 7, 2015 spanning over three billion emails sent.

The findings include:

- Offering a discount in the subject line is popular, but is not correlated with stronger engagement: Of the Black Friday and Cyber Monday marketing emails sent, 38 percent included a discount in the subject line. The most common discounts were 20 and 50 percent, while other discount percentages were much lower. The study found that emails that did not have a discount in the subject line had higher engagement rates.
- Recipients click on the calls-to-action within their emails more quickly on their mobile devices: Mobile clicks skew towards shorter delays relative to desktop clicks; the median (50th percentile) click delay 18 percent shorter for mobile vs desktop (3.7 vs 4.5 hours).
- On weekends, the median click delay approximately doubles: This indicates that the links that are being clicked on weekends tend to belong to older emails. Recipients are likely looking through their inbox at emails that they may have ignored during the workweek.
- Unsubscribes are correlated with engagements: The study showed that higher engagement during Black

Friday and Cyber Monday also led to an increase in unsubscribe rates.

According to a report by GDMA and Winterberry Group, 74 percent of marketers remain confident in the value of data-driven marketing and advertising and its potential for future growth. SendGrid delivers over 22 billion emails per month and recognizes the value of data-driven email marketing for its expanding base of customers which includes CBS Interactive, Taco Bell, Spotify and Airbnb.

“Email is a mission-critical channel for marketers to drive engagement and is one of the most cost-effective way for companies to interact with their customers if done correctly,” said Victor Amin, data scientist, SendGrid. “The aim of this study was to provide marketers with key findings and best practices to improve the success of their email engagement campaigns in 2016.”

The key recommendations for marketers in 2016 include:

- Test subject lines of all email marketing campaigns: Discount offers don't always result in higher engagement. In fact, discounts may have a negative effect on engagement rates. A/B testing is a way to measure the success of your holiday email marketing campaign. Every business and email list is different, so we suggest that you test what works and what doesn't with your recipients. By A/B testing, you can determine which tactic works best.
- Purge the un-interested: Unsubscribes aren't always a bad thing. If a recipient has signed up for your marketing list but changed their mind, it's important that they have a clear and easy method to unsubscribe. If you don't feel comfortable with making the unsubscribe button more prominent, offer recipients a chance to “down-subscribe” or opt-out of certain emails in a preference center. This removes recipients from the extra emails rather than unsubscribing all together.
- Think beyond the holidays: The holiday season marks a huge sales opportunity for businesses, but also gives marketers a chance to build their lists which can benefit them for the rest of the year. Capitalize on the opportunity by creating multiple options for customers to sign up for your mailing list on your website or mobile app. Sign up messages should be short; each time someone new signs up for marketing email, send a stellar welcome email, which is personalized and makes a good first impression.
- Be wary of email fatigue: Oftentimes email fatigue results in more than just unengaged recipients. Sending multiple emails per day can lead to fatigued and annoyed recipients resulting in users blocking, unsubscribing and sending messages to spam. As you think past the holidays, remember to keep your recipient list as clean as possible. Well-maintained lists consistently have higher engagement rates than older, neglected lists. Make sure you're removing addresses that haven't been engaged in a long time and segment your list by engagement. Building a negative reputation with ISPs can have a major impact on revenue, especially around the holidays.
- Focus on email compatibility for desktops and mobile devices: Marketers need to meet the demand for a compelling consumer experience across multiple platforms when it comes to email marketing campaigns. Most email templates are designed for a standard desktop which is too wide for most phones – and could result in preventing horizontal scrolling. Include a plain text version in HTML email and make use of responsive design templates.

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