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EMI: Ask the Expert

What are the top 10 e-mail marketing mistakes?

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E-mail marketing has almost become too easy to execute, given the proliferation of bulk-e-mail providers. It's critical for organizations to be strategic in this tactic and avoid these common mistakes:

- 1. Not having a strategy.** You must have a strategy detailing reasons for the e-mail, content, audience, key messages and metrics.
- 2. Using an outdated list.** You need a permission-based list of opt-in subscribers to increase open rates and reduce undeliverable e-mails. If contacts haven't opted in, you may be flagged as spam and prohibited from sending future e-mails.
- 3. Focusing on nonrelevant content.** Your message must be important to the audience. E-mails with the highest opt-in and open rates are most often thought-leadership topics or personal insights into industry trends.
- 4. Missing an opportunity in your top-line message.** Your message may be viewed in a preview pane with images turned off or on an e-mail system or PDA that doesn't support HTML content. Your top-line message must include a link to a Web-based version—just in case.
- 5. Being too text- or graphic-heavy.** Adding visuals improves appeal, but you need a balance of images versus HTML text. Too much text can be overwhelming if not supported by interesting graphics to move the reader along.
- 6. Being “salesy.”** If your readers sense a sales pitch, it will not only get deleted but they may even unsubscribe from your mailings. Worse yet, they could report your e-mail as spam.
- 7. Forgetting to drive your Web traffic.** Editorial-driven newsletters are best developed with content directing Web site traffic. Include a portion of the story with a link to “read more” and have contextual links relevant to specific Web site pages.
- 8. Testing only on one browser or operating system.** All e-mail systems will not display your message the same, so test it on a PC versus Mac and Internet Explorer versus Firefox. Format consistency is critical for HTML-based e-mails.
- 9. Sending at the wrong time.** Whether your contacts are domestic or international, think about recipients' time zones and business hours. Recent data suggest higher open rates occur on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- 10. Ignoring metrics.** Metrics reveal whether your message was successful. An initial report will show bounce rates so you can scrub your list. An evaluation the day after will begin to show open rates, opt-outs or spam reports.

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