

The Four Essential R's of Email Marketing

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Synchronicity Marketing
Maximizing Synergy for Superior Results

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When it comes to email marketing, here's an easy way to brush up on your vocabulary. Although there are many terms unique to this online marketing channel, the four you need to remember most reinforce the core principles of email while serving as guideposts to ensure your campaign is not only optimized for delivery, but also maximum response.

These must-know "R" words of email marketing are:

- ❑ Reputation
- ❑ Relevancy
- ❑ Relationship-Building
- ❑ ROI

1. Reputation

In email, your Reputation is synonymous with character. The truth is, every marketer who sends email has a reputation, whether they know it or not, whether they actively manage it or not. That reputation dictates if their email reaches the inbox, because as most of us know by now, the real control over the email pipeline rests (despite federal legislation) not with the government, but in the hands of the ISPs who are the gatekeepers of email boxes for millions of recipients.

Today the good news is there are many tools for improving sender deliverability and reputation. But there are no shortcuts. You can't just publish authentication records, (such as Microsoft's Sender ID or Yahoo's DomainKeys records) and be done with it. You can't just send whatever you please, whenever you please, and expect your deliverability team to "make a call" and remove an ISP mail block. However, following best practices to build your reputation isn't hard and besides, it makes good business sense.

The single best and most proactive step you can take to ensure good deliverability and a solid reputation as an email marketer is to employ 100%, affirmative consent opt-in practices when acquiring email addresses. That means your request to join is clear, subscribers have genuine choice and control over being added to the list, and they receive an email confirmation of their action. While 100% opt-in list building methods may result in acquisition of fewer names than other methods (like pre-checked boxes), the trade off in *quality* over *quantity* will be more than worth it.

At the ISPs, reputation is based on a variety of factors and there is no universally agreed-upon reputation scoring formula. However, we know ISPs routinely use three measures to

gauge reputation: 1) bounce rates, 2) blacklists and 3) inbox owner complaints. So steering clear of re-mailing bad or out-of-date email addresses, staying off blacklists, and ensuring your messages are highly *relevant* (see below) to your audience will go a long way toward maintaining a high reputation. For a reputation audit or help in this area, see Return Path's Sender Score Reputation Management Service at www.returnpath.biz.

2. Relevancy

It's a fashionable buzzword in email these days, but it's really nothing new to solid direct marketing. After all, direct is all about creating and growing one-to-one relationships, which require a relevant context in which to bloom. Sadly, with email's rapid growth has come a universal approach to messaging that seems to have forgotten the core principles of good direct response – know your audience, and segment, segment, segment!

Knowing your audience in email means not only knowing the basics about them such as geo- and demographic (age, income, etc.) traits, but also knowing as much as possible about their *context* – both the frame of mind they're in when they sign up for your list, and the behavioral context in which your messages reach them. For example, did they join your list in response to a request for free information? In that case, they'll likely welcome your email if it delivers on the promise by providing rich, timely, useful content when it arrives. If on the other hand they ended up on a list in response to a contest or sweepstakes, they're likely to be more interested in winning a prize than in doing business with you.

Understanding context also means asking list members at sign-up to state their interests and then exceeding their expectations, as well as understanding and tracking patterns of response history to discern the most likely periods during which your messages will be open and acted upon. Taken together, knowing how someone signed up, when they signed up, what they are interested in, and which geo-demographic profile they fit can and should drive your email list segmentation, creative, offers and content. If you want your email to be highly relevant, don't develop a one-size-fits-all campaign. Instead, create different versions of your message customized to unique audience segments.

3. Relationship-Building

Exceptional email marketing goes way beyond an amateur batch-and-blast approach and certainly beyond sending stand-alone promotions, news and announcements. It engages prospects or customers *in a relationship*. As we find ourselves in the latter half of the 2000's, email marketers are at last beginning to experiment with trigger-based and dialogue marketing. And email is the ideal channel in which to do so because it is cheap, fast, and easy to deploy.

Building relationships with email is easy for retention marketers, those who already have a captive customer base. When a dialogue begins with email, primary messaging (such as a regularly-scheduled email newsletter) is used as a starting and communications-maintenance point, and various degrees of response to primary email communications place responders on different dialogue tracks for further follow-up. Web interactions, during which customers proactively search for or visit your company's site, are more likely email dialog starting points and can trigger different series of email communications.

For example, a customer visits her electric power company's site interested in its green energy program, requests information, and receives an email providing instructions for enrollment as well as a request for future action (perhaps the download of additional information, or request to subscribe to a conservation newsletter). Response to the email then generates the next communication, and so on and so on until a conversion is achieved – until a call to action is completed and a desired transaction closed.

The most successful email relationship-building programs are the result of well-defined strategies and pre-developed dialogue tracks created before primary messaging ever goes out the door. They employ a minimum number of proactive email contacts over the course of a year and branch into different routes governed by different response rules depending upon audience interaction over the specified interval. There is considerable fore-thought and planning involved with dialogue email marketing, which is what makes it both more complex and infinitely higher performing than less sophisticated approaches.

4. ROI

At the end of the day, it's only worth doing if it's working, and for most direct marketing initiatives ROI is the ultimate measure of success. Simply put, did your program generate more economic value than it cost? Did the time and cost investment in email yield measurable gains? For e-commerce companies, the ROI of email marketing can be measured in dollars and cents – in sales revenue vs. program costs; but for myriad other businesses this is not the case. Nonetheless, other measurement of success such as brand impressions, page views, downloads, forwards, completed forms, and qualified leads *are* valuable and merit tracking and value attribution.

Remember, you're ultimately competing with yourself. The goal of any email marketing program should be one of continuous performance improvement. Turn negative ROI into positive by practicing the principles outlined here and don't abandon ship after an initial unsuccessful effort. This is a learning medium. Instead, constantly test, test, test and use the intelligence gained to improve poor ROI or maximize return on good ROI. By keeping the four essential R's of email marketing top-of-mind, the only place to go is up!

About Synchronicity Marketing

Synchronicity Marketing™ (www.synchronicitymarketing.com) is a consulting firm specializing in direct, integrated and email marketing strategy, planning and education. The company is dedicated to improving marketing effectiveness and increasing return-on-investment by *harmoniously synchronizing* individual marketing activities into holistic programs which result in a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Founded and led by Karen Talavera, a 15 year direct marketing veteran and email marketing expert, the company specializes in creating multi-channel, integrated marketing strategies to help clients maximize the performance of their customer acquisition and retention programs. Synchronicity Marketing also offers direct and email marketing education via custom in-house seminars. The company is located in the Miami area.

To learn more about successful email marketing or schedule a custom in-house seminar contact Synchronicity at 561.967.9665 or info@synchronicitymarketing.com