



10 Ways to Give Your Retail Program a Boost

NGR

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In today's crowded, ultra-competitive marketplace, savvy retailers are always looking for new opportunities to build loyalty and drive dramatic increases in revenue. While perpetual optimization is a habit all marketers should adopt, the real breakthroughs are most likely to come from a few key areas that can yield incremental revenue opportunities— but that many retailers may overlook.

Here are 10 ways you can stand out from the plethora of unwanted promotional messages piling up in inboxes and instead communicate with customers through highly relevant messaging that will help increase revenue.

1) Maximize opt-ins and collect key data.

Be sure every page on your site has a benefit-driven email opt-in form. Collecting the email address, even from people who don't purchase from you, will not only add interested subscribers to your database but will also provide email addresses you can use to contact them later for remarketing emails.

The preference center is a key step in the opt-in process, because it helps readers tailor their subscriptions at the time when they're most interested in your email. When subscribers can choose the content they want, how often they want to receive it and in the format they prefer, you help them create more meaningful and relevant email, which they will expect, maybe even anticipate seeing in their inboxes and be able to distinguish quickly from spam.

Don't force new subscribers to fill out a detailed form right at the start, though, because you likely haven't developed a strong-enough relationship with the subscriber yet. Ask for basic information at the opt-in, such as name and email address, and provide

some basic options: content, format and frequency—data you need to deliver relevant emails out of the gate.

Next, invite them to refine or complete their preferences in your welcome message. Here, you can link to your full preference center with more email options or demographic requests.

Finally, invite them back to your preference center throughout the relationship to update their preferences or fill out a more detailed, but still relevant, list of questions.

Link to your preference center in every email message and put it in a standard location, such as in your core email navigation or in an administration center in the lower part of your email.

Despite the many benefits of a preference center, only 33 percent of top retailers offer subscribers choices at opt-in¹, making this a prime opportunity for retailers to differentiate themselves from the competition.

2) Manage expectations with welcome programs.

The best welcome programs engage new subscribers immediately, introduce them to your entire email program, and reduce unsubscribes, spam complaints and inactivity down the road. So make sure you've crafted an organized, automated series of emails designed to achieve these objectives.

Begin with a branded "From" name and a personalized message with a welcoming subject line launched immediately after opt-in. This helps you build inbox recognition even before you send your first marketing message.

Use this message to confirm subscription details, restate the email program's value proposition, ask to be added to the address book, invite them back to fill out a profile, redeem an incentive if appro-

ropriate, and provide contact information.

Follow up with a timed series of emails that show subscribers more of what you're about. You might discuss certain features of your service or website, highlight popular articles or products, even provide a survey to see how they like you so far.

By delivering a top-tier welcome program, you'll help bring new subscribers back to your website and motivate them to make an initial purchase early in the relationship, order regularly from you and increase their order sizes.

3) Take advantage of segmentation and dynamic content.

No matter how brilliant your content, today's marketplace demands that you speak to customers in a one-to-one fashion, rather than sending them blanket "one-size-fits-all" messaging. In fact, the single most important way you can improve your email performance is to boost relevance through the increased use of segmentation and dynamic content.

Dynamic content allows you to build messages piece by piece based on specific recipient characteristics, and it's one of the best marketing techniques for improving targeting, controlling frequency and driving relevancy all at the same time. Whether you send to your entire list or a subset of your list, dynamic content allows you to send fewer messages and get better responses.

When it comes to segmentation, there are many ways you can slice and dice your recipient list. For example, you could segment out your most loyal enthusiasts and your lapsed subscribers, sending the former special promotions for top customers and the latter surveys that identify reasons for lack of engagement or incentives to revisit your website.

4) Optimize send times.

What's the best time to send your contacts email? For years retailers have agonized over this decision. But a new technology called Send Time Optimization (STO) has helped render the debate obsolete. The technology analyzes recipient behavior on a rolling basis to predict the ideal email delivery time—across countries and time zones—for each address on your mailing list.

The system then individually delivers messages to recipients at the precise day and time they're most likely to be in their inboxes. By decreasing the chance that an email gets buried in the inbox, open, click-through and conversion rates increase.

Scheduling delivery at the optimized time also solves international mailing challenges. With a single send, messages are delivered at the optimal time, worldwide, eliminating the need to schedule multiple sends across time zones.

When optimizing send times, don't forget that sending the right message is just as important—if not more-than sending at the right time.

5) Employ real-time testing.

Testing has always been an essential part of email marketing, but with new testing technologies you can eliminate the delay between testing and implementation, serving up the winning variable content in real time.

Real-time testing services use A/B split or multivariate tests and measure responses on the initial portion of a campaign while it's being delivered. As recipients open and act on the messages, the software calculates the winning message combination and then delivers it to the rest of your mailing list once it reaches a desired confidence level (typically a 95 percent interval).

As a result, you can be more confident that you're basing campaign

decisions on updated, relevant data instead of hunches or outdated data. Perpetual testing leads to perpetual optimization of your core message content, which will inevitably result in increased revenues.

And as real-time testing and its resulting optimization becomes a standard element of your marketing workflow, your email team will also have more time to work on other projects that impact the bottom line.

6) Fine-tune social sharing initiatives.

If you're encouraging subscribers to share your content in their social networks, be sure you're providing a good experience.

First, know which networks your subscribers are most likely to share in. Facebook and Twitter are the obvious ones, but depending on your niche, other social networks may yield even higher social-sharing rates.

Test offers, copy and location to find out which are most "shareworthy." Long newsletters are likely to be shared less, while other content practically begs to be shared—think anything before it hits other communication channels, such as new products, stores, collections or movies.

Identify your most active sharers and regularly engage with them, providing special benefits where applicable. These persuaders can have a huge impact, with one industry study showing that 90 percent of consumers trust recommendations from people they know.² With that in mind, cultivate increased loyalty and give these brand ambassadors further incentive to share even more.

7) Create cart and browse abandonment campaigns.

These data-driven programs can become major revenue drivers. A timely email reminder will bring many shoppers back to complete checkout instead of going to a competitor.

When optimizing your cart-abandonment program, consider creating a multi-email series. For example, you could send the first message within a few hours after abandonment, the second message two to three days later and the third a week or so later.

Adopt a service tone, offering to complete the transaction in other channels, such as through live chat or a call center, and asking if the shopper had a problem at checkout.

Refrain from offering incentives in the first message, but add them in ensuing messages as needed to increase conversions. Of course, test, test, test.

Browse-abandonment messages, which usually take the form of a friendly email noting the shopper looked at certain products or categories and then left the site, build on the success many retailers have had with cart-abandonment messages. Again, adopt a service tone, and test number of messages and timing.

8) Optimize transactional emails.

These highly relevant messages, which typically produce open, click-through and conversion rates two to three times those of broadcast emails, can do more than confirm purchases or shipping schedules. If you haven't already, move to a system that allows you to create well-branded, trackable HTML messages to which you can add dynamic content.

Keep the main focus on the transaction, in order to comply with the CAN-SPAM Act. However, you're leaving opportunity on the table if you don't use transactional messages to add relevant marketing content and reinforce your brand and value proposition.

Take advantage of up-sell and cross-sell opportunities. Using third-party technologies, recommend complementary products such as accessories or related products based either on the customer's preferences, previous purchases or "other customers also bought these items" suggestions.

Use images and brief copy to promote them. Even a generic "deal of the month" promotion can lift revenues by taking advantage of the

high open rates that transactional messages generate.

9) Create a post-purchase email strategy.

Your email program should expand past the purchase process, looking beyond the transaction and trying to turn those new customers into loyal shoppers.

A series of triggered or targeted messages that reflect customer activity and preferences will keep your email program fresh after the initial purchase. These give you a reason to reach out to your customer with messages that go beyond “buy-buy-buy.”

For example, invite a buyer to review the purchased product(s) and/or share the purchase with his or her social network connections. When customers do so, you can follow up with a review notification informing them their review(s) has been posted, thanking them and potentially offering a thank-you discount or offer.

Asking for feedback is a smart way to engage customers, so send an email requesting that the customer complete a survey measuring satisfaction with the product or service, order/download process and shipping or delivery. Include customer-support or troubleshooting contact information.

Other effective post-purchase messages include bounceback emails (provides incentive to bring recent buyer back to repurchase), invitations to join loyalty/preferred customer program (benefit-focused emails for those that didn't register earlier), and purchase anniversary emails (notes anniversary of first purchase and invites to repurchase, with or without incentive).

10) Offer unsubscribe preference centers.

Using the opt-out as an opportunity to remind subscribers of your communication offering and give them alternate options to unsubscribing is a useful revenue-saving step. That's because many subscribers who click the unsubscribe link don't actually want to leave—

but they do want some aspect of the relationship to change.

If users click on the unsubscribe link, direct them to a combination preference center/unsubscribe page. Again, don't obfuscate the unsubscribe language or process, but do make it clear that they can choose to do something besides opt out.

The key is to make it easy and drive the unsubscribers to a combination unsubscribe/preference page that allows them to either easily opt out or change preferences such as frequency (weekly, monthly), format (text, HTML), channel (RSS, SMS text messages) and areas of interest.

With only 32 percent of retailers offering a preference page at opt-out¹, this is another easy way to gain an edge on the competition.

Conclusion

Amidst the growing noise and clutter filling consumer inboxes, retailers must communicate value quickly before these customers tune out, opt out and buy elsewhere. That means delivering content that solves customer problems. Measuring and responding to customer behaviors. And communicating at the right time through the right channels.

By employing the tactics listed on the previous pages, savvy marketers can more strongly engage customers, gain a competitive advantage over rival retailers, and uncover hidden revenue sources in the process. Now's the time to take your marketing program up a notch with more sophisticated techniques that will better increase customer lifetime value, incent customers to buy more frequently and up the average order value.

About NGR

NGR provides innovative enterprise marketing management solutions that turn your passion for marketing into business success. NGR transforms how marketing and sales teams of all sizes work and work together to accelerate predictable revenue.

NGR's solutions are both powerful and easy to use, providing explosive revenue growth throughout the revenue cycle from the earliest stages to demand generation and lead management to deal close and continued customer loyalty.

In past 48 months, we have been working on developing various marketing and sales solutions which assists organizations in improving customer relations and further improves the bottom-line.

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