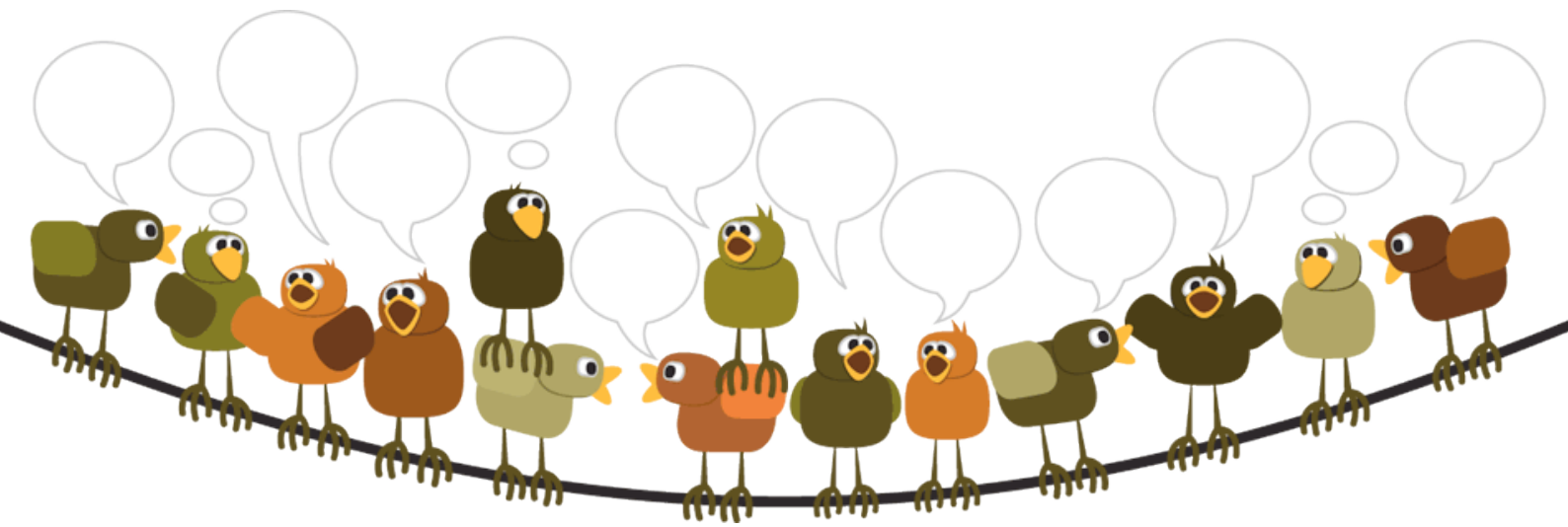


Death of the announcement,
**birth of the
dialogue**



Death of the announcement, birth of the dialogue

It's Good to Talk

Ok, so we are all talking to our customers, prospects etc. in some form or another, whether that may be on the web, blogs, phone, email.

Talking to them is one thing but are we telling them what they want to hear, are we listening as well? I think that is where we can learn.

Dialogue

- *noun* 1 conversation between two or more people as a feature of a book, play, or film.
2 discussion directed towards exploration of a subject or resolution of a problem.
- *verb* chiefly N. Amer. take part in dialogue.
 - *ORIGIN* Greek *dialogos*, from *dialegethai* 'converse with'.

A great quote below from the genius Seth Godin, bit of free promo for him here. If anyone doesn't know who Seth is I would recommend checking out his blog.

"Some organizations are good at listening. Some are good at talking. A few are even good at both. But having a dialogue is different. It's about engaging in (sometimes) uncomfortable conversations that enable both sides to grow and change."

"A dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. It is also a literary form in which two or more parties engage in a discussion"

So what is it we are talking about when we say dialogue marketing? We're describing a company's efforts to engage consumers in ongoing conversations that create lasting relationships.

You can use these different interactions as data collection points. The data then allows you to further customise your marketing messages and personalise the experience for recipients in exchange for sharing opinions, buying patterns and product preferences.

As audiences have become more sophisticated and inbox activity has increased, email has had to evolve, offering more than just a sales pitch. Dull, mass-produced, non-relevant emails are no longer adequate. Communications need to add value, offer something that the recipient wants, and ultimately open up dialogue.

Engaging your audience will enable you to understand their needs and discover how they want to be communicated to. How do they perceive your business? What are you doing right or wrong? If you can answer these questions, it will enable you to make valuable changes to your customer offering.



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In the form of email, dialogue is about sending message to your recipients that are relevant and engage them. Then based on previous interactions, change your communication accordingly.

The Crowded Inbox

Most of us receive a high level of unsolicited and permission-based email in our inbox today. That means as email marketers there is a lot of competition and it is hard to get noticed. This is why there are a number of important factors to make sure you are ahead of the competition.

I believe in this climate, as well as the inbox, you are competing with a lot of other noise. Through the growing phenomenon of social networking, such as Twitter, a lot of individuals spend more time in the social networking arena than in the inbox. They also have inboxes within these networks as well making it more difficult to always get your brand noticed and interacted with. Generally with more information channels available, recipients are less likely to listen to what you have to say.

This means that your emails need to be attention grabbing & relevant to stand out from the crowd. Utilise other marketing channels to enhance your email marketing, this in turn should increase your ROI. Segment your lists and then make sure you use your brand name in the subject line for quick recognition. Offer value to the recipient for signing up, giving them access to offers they would not normally get. Design for the preview pane and images off. These are all important in making sure your brand is noticed.

Back in the Old Days

So the first email ever was sent by a guy called Ray Tomlinson in 1971, the text of which was hardly earth shattering "QWERTYUIOP", Tomlinson later commented that these "test messages were entirely forgettable and I have, therefore, forgotten".



Email has become a lot more sophisticated as a marketing tool now. Not so long ago the batch & blast or spray & pray approach was used by lots of companies. The more people you emailed the more sales you got and to an extent this did actually work. This was also similar in the TV advertising world where the companies that succeeded had a commodity product that they mass advertised, proving rather successful.

More and more people began using email on a daily basis, particularly in their work environments.

Spam laws have put a significant stop to a lot of unsolicited email but often the stigma is all too easily dredged up if a company is still using old techniques. That negative stigma can spread quickly in an age where you can opt-out and then complain and share the experience with vast networks at the touch of a button.

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So the days of spam-centric mass produced emails are coming to an end. The holy grail of email is not one too many but one to one. Less is most definitely more.

Email 1.0 vs. Email 2.0

Batch & blast is taken on by the more personal 1-to-1.

We have already noted that the batch & blast technique doesn't work. It's very easy to hit the spam button. You may have signed up to receive some information but if it's not relevant then why would you want to continue to receive it? Recipients are too clued up for that and privacy issues play a big part in why personalisation works.

Be aware of your sender reputation. There are a number of tools out there to check issues with deliverability, however if you've been sending rubbish for a long time has your rep diminished? It's all very well pushing your product out there but do people actually want to know about it? If they already own it then a feature update may be of more interest. Make sure you know your audience and they will want to know you. This can be done by checking the metrics in reports, to see different interactions, build behavioural profiles and target your messaging accordingly.

Finally, check your list quality – the whole quality over quantity saying. Many lists are diminishing but this is a good thing. Renting & buying lists is all well and good but a recent national benchmarking report from the DMA noticed a significant difference in the gulf between acquisition & retention email.

Knowing Me, Knowing You

Who is your audience?

Gaining as much information as you can from your audience is vital. This gives you the ability to tailor your messages based on the initial data given to you.

You may already have data within your CRM but if you are collecting email addresses from your website the sign-up page is extremely important. Dependant on your product you want to make sure you have enough data to enable some form of segmentation or personalisation. Too much requested information, however, may put people off.

A good option is to have a 2 step sign-up process, initially just an email address and then take the recipient to a new page for additional information.

You are asking for permission to send messages to the recipient so ask how frequently they would like to be emailed and what information they would like? Also tell them what they are going to receive.



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Making a First Impression

How often do we sign up for some information or a newsletter, then a month later when it has been scheduled to go out you receive the email and have no idea when, where or how you signed up for this information? This will often prompt someone to unsubscribe. This is a big fail from the company. First impressions last in all types of situations, it is no different in email.



Welcome emails are a great way to engage with recipients immediately. A strong initial email always leaves a good impression.

This could be in the form of your latest newsletter where a person is highly likely to click through as they have already gone to the effort of signing up.

Vital, in my opinion, is the 'from' address they firstly need to recognise your brand. Secondly, having

'noreply@' at the start is a big no-no. If you can't reply to an email and get a human response then you are basically saying, "we don't want to talk to you, we are going to send you information and we don't care what you think".

Sequential mailing / auto responders

Once in the email channel it is important to keep your recipients interested.

Using sequential campaigns is a great way of achieving this. Set automated scheduled emails to be sent within specific time frames. These can be in many different forms, reminder style messages or increased discounts as incentives to sign up.

For example an online dating site utilises a series of auto responders to entice their recipients to upgrade to a paid subscription. This can allow a campaign to run continuously with a constant dialogue to their recipient. The brand loyalty is likely to increase and if they do sign up they will be taken out of the loop.

Auto responders can also be used in a transactional sense, which leads me nicely on to the transactional email...

The Transactional Email

Your email marketing and customer relationship campaigns are spot-on. Your website is a shopper's dream. You've done everything right to garner customer loyalty and repeat sales, right? Maybe not.

There's an often-overlooked element of customer communication that has the potential to bring your customers back for more again and again: The transactional email message. That boring, text-based necessity that follows each online sale, such as an order confirmation, a shipping notice, a change in order status or anything else that requires your company to communicate or inform your customers.

Leveraging transactional email for marketing messages is beginning to gain ground with online merchants for good reason. These are requested or expected messages, which are sent one at a time.

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Unlike bulk marketing campaigns that can trigger spam filters; the transactional email goes on through like any other single message. This high deliverability rate makes it an attractive and largely untapped vehicle for marketers.

What's more, statistics show that transactional email is opened more than twice as much as promotional email.

A 2007 survey showed that 54% of customers “very often or always read” transactional email, whereas only 21% do the same with promotional messages.

Consider adding a marketing message that will motivate your customer to return to your website within a defined timeframe. You might offer an incentive to take a customer feedback survey, a discount on purchases made before a certain date, a coupon, free shipping on the next order or a gift for referrals — it could be anything that will strengthen your relationship with the customer. Some software applications even allow you to insert dynamic HTML messages, which integrate relevant cross and up-sell offers based on prior purchases and customer preferences, into your transactional email.

It is permissible — and advisable — to switch your transactional email from a text format to HTML. By branding your email with your logo and mirroring the look and feel of your website, you are not only making your transactional emails more attractive, inviting and readable, you are reinforcing your brand and effectively closing the loop on your customer's entire buying experience. There's no law that says transactional email have to look like they came out of a dot-matrix printer.

Taking advantage of the inherent benefits of transactional email — high deliverability and click-through rates — just makes marketing sense. If you take care to keep the intent of the message true to its original purpose, transactional email can be an effective marketing tool that keeps your customers coming back for more.



Listen to the Silence

It is our instinct to focus on the wins and when it comes to email we are no different. Often the initial figure we want to see is opens and clicks. The positive responses make us feel good. But there are many reasons that people didn't click such as the timing or the offer. So it's really useful to concentrate on the not opens and not clicks as well.

Truprint did exactly that, tailoring their email slightly differently with a bigger incentive. They listened to the silence of the people that didn't interact. So they offered them something different by increasing the discount level across not only specialised their Easter products but also any prints ordered. The creative was changed with a more prominent call to action.

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Integration with other Marketing channels

I touched earlier on how we should not be seeing email as a stand-alone channel. It should be part of your overall marketing mix.

Once recipients have clicked where are they going? Do they convert? You should use email to add value to your other marketing channels. Increase your website traffic. Drive them to specific areas and messages.

Increasingly, active email marketers are wondering how they can engage with their subscribers in the new and fast-growing world of social media.

It's a bit scary because most email is still of the "batch and blast" variety and that dog will not hunt in social media, where the marketing is conversational and the name of the game is relevance.

But assuming you aren't looking at social media as a messaging venue, rather an opportunity to learn about your customers and for them to learn about your brand - tying your email and social media efforts together should be a 2009 prime directive.

Here's 3 easy ways to do so:

1 Collect profile data in subscription forms

Offer your email subscribers the option of including their Twitter name on your subscription form. Something like "We care about our customers. Can we follow you on Twitter? Please provide your Twitter name, and we'll follow you ASAP. (We're at @twittername, by the way)"

2 Promote social media outposts in welcome messages

When you send your welcome message after initial subscription (you ARE sending welcome messages, aren't you?), include links to your various social media outposts. Carefully track which links get clicked, as it will give you indications of which are the most popular amongst your customers.

3 Social media-only offers

If you really want to get a handle on which social media venues your customers prefer, and in what intensity, create an email that includes links to special offers or promotion codes that are shown only on your social media profile pages. Something like: "We've got incredible offers available on items we think you'd love. For details and promotion codes, visit us online on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter"



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Opting out

Opting out is where you can gain some vital information from your recipients. Having an unsubscribe landing page with multiple options and further feedback questions is great for learning what went wrong for the future. Also you may want to offer other ways to stay in touch.

Instead of an 'unsubscribe' why not offer a preference centre option to reduce frequency of emails. Maybe they are getting too many? Or perhaps the particular information they signed up to is no longer of interest but they would like to see more information on other products & services? Someone who leaves with a nice experience is a lot more likely to come back.

Frequency



It is very important to look at reporting to determine a good frequency of emails.

With the amount of email we receive and the unsubscribe or junk button available at the click of a button, frequency is key to making sure you are not talking too much. The second largest reason subscribers choose to opt-out of permission email is because of too high a frequency.

Offer options on frequency at point of sign up, asking permission on when to send. Rather than just an unsubscribe option, build in a preference centre so recipients can manage when they receive emails from you and also what they receive. They may want to have product updates but not your newsletter.

Mailing too much is one thing, but not mailing enough is another danger. Email Marketing 101 is to get your brand at the forefront of your recipient's mind when it is the right time for them to buy. If you are mailing less than once a month your recipients can forget about you easily.

To determine frequency you can look for trends within your responses, declining open & click thru rates could be a sign of fatigue.

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In Summary

The web has evolved and email has evolved with it. Many Marketers see email as a tick box to their marketing strategy, but it can be a whole lot more than that if done well and effectively. It is all well and good delivering a monthly newsletter but what is it trying to achieve?

I believe email is still the most prevalent digital communication channel in its ability to engage and inspire action in prospects & customers. To achieve results it is about utilising new technologies and techniques, constantly learning from your recipients and applying those learning's to future campaigns. Listen don't just talk, don't see replies and feedback as a nuisance but see them as a chance to learn and apply change.

If you do email well, you will be rewarded by results. Email is very much alive.

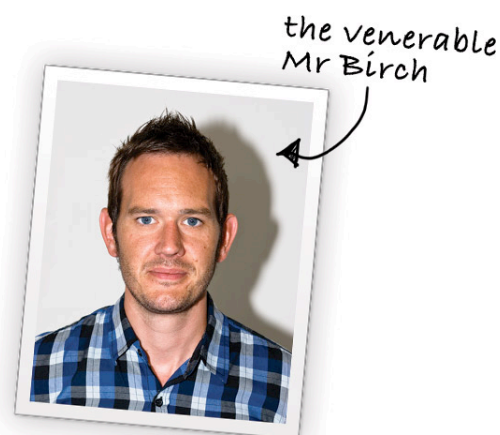
Want to Know More?

Author of this whitepaper, Duncan Birch, is one of the many talented and experienced people who make up the team at Pure 360.

Founded in 2001, Pure 360 is one of Europe's top email marketing companies. Recently listed as the fastest growing email service provider in Europe by GP Bullhound, the multilingual email platform PureResponse is used by 2000 marketers in over 50 countries.

Pure provides brands and agencies, regardless of size, the technology, know-how and support to run effective email marketing campaigns that have a measurable and positive impact on their business. With a simple online interface and in-depth reporting tools the PureResponse email platform was created by marketers for marketers, to make email marketing easy.

Brighton-based Pure has a portfolio of customers that includes innocent drinks, LA Fitness, Rightmove, Seatwave and media giant The FT Group. The platform can also be available as a whitelabel service for agencies.



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