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4Rs of Email marketing – A Practitioner’s Guide! By Sachin Uppal



An in-depth tutorial or a hand-book on email marketing or a practitioner’s guide to email marketing. I have covered various components of email marketing. I have tried to put together resources from various email marketing or lead automation solution providers in a single place.

3 years ago I got introduced to a simple yet effective concept of marketing, “**Email Marketing**” or “Inbox Marketing”. As simple as it sounds, it means sending an email to a prospective customer or an existing one, either to share some existing piece of information, or about informing or educating them on some new product or service that you can offer or may be just to say “Hi”.

Well **Email marketing** has been highly regarded for being able to get the highest returns on investments. It involves the least cost, requires the least set-up time, and you can see the responses very quickly. Though it might just sound like sending out an email, it’s not that simple!

In today’s time people can choose what they want to receive in their inbox. The good old ways of pushing the message in someone’s inbox is gone. **Today’s it’s about the 4Rs of Marketing: - Relation, Request, Relevance and Returns/Revenue.**

In simple words, today marketers need to strike up an engaging **relation** with prospects or customers during which the customers could **request** for some information and the content that you are offering should be **relevant** to the customers or prospects to get real **returns** on your investments (Revenue).

Components of Email Marketing

- Email Content
- Email Subject Lines
- Email Testing
- Email Design CTAs
- Email Opt-in Techniques
- Deliverability
- Key metrics – CTRs, Opens, Forwards

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4 Rs in Action: - Relation building – Requesting Opt-in – providing Relevancy - ROI

- **Email Content – Keep the promise!**

How do you build a relation with your friends? May be you get introduced by someone to a friend or may be you met someone somewhere (online in this case) or may be you just make a promise and live up to it and strengthen your relation with friends and over a period of time convert them to loyal friends.

It's something similar in case of a customer relationship management through email marketing. Let's say you were running an ad in a website or hired some space in a targeted newsletter and you were offering something useful for a prospective customer, you started generating traffic to your website through it and got people interested and started increasing your list size. Now, what is important is that you should remember to "**keep the promise**", the promise that you made while gathering the information of the prospect. You made a promise to deliver a useful and relevant piece of information like a whitepaper, survey, research report etc. Obviously you should focus on your business, definitely, however, keep your promise by investing in the promise that you made continuously. Or else, you would be not more than anyone else in the same business. The only way you can differentiate is by keeping your promise to the customer during the time you acquired that customer's **relation**.

As relevancy is taking the utmost importance in today's time, it's imperative to deliver highly relevant content. There are various ways to achieve this. You can manage your CRM system effectively and capture various details about your customers and prospects and leverage that data for delivering highly relevant content. This is no rocket science. It's something which Google.com, Amazon.com and many other companies do, by learning about your preference and delivering what you need.

Additionally you can look at [Omniture Segmentation Guide](#), [Docmetrics - Document Optimization](#), [Silverpops – Testing Methodology](#), [Forrester's Web Analytics report](#), Geographical optimization, Behavioral Triggering and Instance based triggering.

So let's say while you are building your CRM database, keep a field open which says "Acquisition Source" which can be a pick list with values like: Banner Ads, Ad Words, Referral, Forward from a Friend etc. However, important thing to notice is to keep another field which says offer chosen like: Whitepaper, Survey, Research Report, Tech Paper, Event registration, Tips and tricks, Videos etc.

Just by doing this small activity you know later on what the interest type of the person was, so that the next time you wish to roll out some offer, you can just bundle it with another Whitepaper, Video, Survey etc and you were able to deliver on your promise while keeping your **relation and relevancy**.

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Some important things to keep in mind are not to use potential SPAM words in the content or else your email deliverability will get hurt. [Find the list of TOP 100 potential spam words here.](#)

- **Email Design and Subject Lines**

46% of Marketers take 15 secs to create email Subject Lines

One of the most important things in email marketing / website content development is the subject lines. Even though the above statistic is just an example to showcase that how a good subject line should be, simultaneously, it's an indication that a lot of marketers do not spend enough time in creating subject lines.

I have created subject lines which have got me open rates as high as 40% and clickthru rates as high as 20% however, I have also created bad subject lines which yielded open rates as bad as 8% and clickthru rates of 0.7%.

It's very evident from my experience that a good subject line can really decide the success and failure of a campaign. Just imagine you spent hours all together with teams in brainstorming and coming up with the right strategies and communication messages. But while executing you forgot to test the subject line and spent like 5 secs. in creating something that struck you at that moment and suddenly the entire campaign fell through as people didn't open your emails at all.

Damn it's annoying but true, that, something as simple as a subject line can kill the productivity of a brilliantly crafted message and designed campaign.

Some examples which work ... mostly:

- Personalization
- Questions
- Emotive words
- Using statistics
- Using numbers
- Using company name
- Put Whitepaper: , Survey: , Tech Report: , as the starting words.

Here are some examples:

- Hello {firstname}, are you among the TOP 100 {jobtitle}?
- Hi {firstname}, 5 mins Step-by-Step approach to plan your vacation.
- 77% of the {jobtitle}s have registered with us, {firstname} have you?
- Are you weak like your colleagues?
- Whitepaper: Garbage the future of energy?
- Survey: 86% of HR heads are outsourcing recruitments.
- Majority Declared: 91% of mothers spread the word.
- {Companyname} Weekly Round-up: Customers want synergy at low cost.

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Email Design – Is your CTA Actionable?

CTA or Call to action is like the button on your TV remote which when triggered makes your TV do the things which you want it to do. Similarly your CTAs should be punchy and actionable. Well crafted too, so that when you take an action by clicking some link on the email you should be able to drive the relevant action from the customer/prospect.

Your CTA should be placed well in the email which is easily located. Also, it should come at a point in time that there is some suspense element, some kind of need that is created and should create urgency.

Examples:

- Using quick links in the newsletter.
- Offers should be highly visible.
 - Probably using colours, images, or simple text (but should be punchy and actionable)
 - For European, Asia and American geos, preferably left aligned or centre aligned
 - For Middle Eastern geos, preferably right align.
- CTAs like **click here** should be avoided as they trigger spam filters.
- Read more..., Learn more..., Get this whitepaper here, Get your own copy, Click to continue... and more...

- **Email Opt-in techniques and Deliverability.**

Opt-in means that your prospects and customers have chosen to communicate with you. Opt-in status “yes” means that the user wants to communicate with you or your company so its fine your communication is not unsolicited. Also your email should comply with the [CAN SPAM act](#).

There are a lot of ways that marketers leverage to create an opt-in status of a user. Some of the questions that you should ask to see how you are building database.

- How do you collect consent from recipients to send commercial or promotional email: double opt-in, opt-in with verification; opt-in; preselected option with verification; or other?
- How do you collect consent to share email addresses with third parties or affiliates: double opt-in, opt-in with verification; opt-in; pre-selected option with verification; or other?
- How do you determine whether third parties who provide you email addresses have obtained their users’ consent: in writing; reviewed their consent method; reviewed the URL where the third party obtained consent; or other?
- Do you send commercial or promotional email based on prior business relationships but without prior consent?
- Do you require users to accept your commercial or promotional email as a condition of doing business with you?

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You can run whitepaper, survey, e-book, research reports, webzines, webinar download campaigns, and generate opt-ins. You can look at even banner ads or you can hire in some space in newsletters or run a contest or even better may be a viral campaign etc depending on your business needs.

Here are two email opt-in and deliverability guides from Email Labs which are a must read.

[EmailLabs – Grow Email Opt-In List](#)

[Email Labs - Email Deliverability Guide](#)

- **Key Email Marketing Metrics – CTRs, Opens, Forwards, Leads, Quotes, Revenue, Market Share**

While marketers do all this jazz of email marketing, tracking, optimizing, testing the core objective in my perspective should be sales revenue. Whether it is marketing leads to sales closure or its direct marketing online closure.

So certain key metrics to be looked at can be: Clickthru rates, Open rates, Forwards (if it's a viral), Website visits, Leads generated, Leads getting converted to quotes, and finally how much revenue is generated.

Also some of the CMOs metrics should be the market share attained. How much share holder's value enhanced?

Clickthru rates shows 2 things:

Whether you communicated to the right audience or not?

Also whether your CTAs were well planned and executed?

Leads generated on the microsites or websites show if you were really able to give the experience to the prospects or not. These leads truly showcase how marketing can add value to the organization's business objectives as well as it adds to the brand awareness.

Leads getting converted into quotes and finally into revenue is the true marketing success. Though there is element of Sales skills involved in it, however, online closure of deals is a pure, honest marketing success!

An annual review of market share expansion should be conducted by the CMO to understand the impact of the marketing and ROI analysis through various media should determine the future expenditure planning and budgeting.