



# Rethinking the value of email marketing

As email usage grows each year, fresh marketing approaches must be considered.

According to the Radicati Group, a market research firm that provides, amongst others, quantitative and qualitative research on email and social networking, the number of email users worldwide in 2016 is estimated at 2.6b and will reach 3b by the end of 2020. It also says nearly half of the worldwide population will be using email by that year's end. Marketers, then, are not discounting the impact of email marketing on businesses and their strategies, given the wide, and still expanding, reach of email. Three marketers give their thoughts on email marketing, related trends and threats, and its future.

## Mobile is the future

Email has been incredibly effective and will remain so for the foreseeable future, says **Josh Steimle**, CMO, MWI. He cites a Litmus State of Email 2016 report, which showed that email was the preferred mode of communication for 72% of respondents.

However Steimle notes that email marketing via mobile should be particularly observed. "The effectiveness of email marketing is decreasing on the desktop, but is increasing on mobile. According to a Litmus study during 2015, mobile open rates increased 17%, representing 55% of all email opens with webmail and desktop opens both decreasing," he says. Steimle notes that this is happening at the same time that mobile usage rates are generally increasing, meaning that mobile email marketing is a huge opportunity.

Given that email usage continues to grow, it is logical as well for marketers to evolve their way of thinking about email marketing. "In this day and age of always-on communications, we have to relearn/rethink how we use email marketing," says **Mark Roberts**, CMO, ShoreTel. Building "social debt" with our audience is a powerful tool, but only if we understand how to make

those quality connections upfront, he notes. "When it comes to this form of marketing, the future is bright, but only if we revisit it through a more human lens," Roberts muses.

For him, the biggest threat to email marketing is the lack of relationship building. "Social channels are all about the social debt we can build, how we can help others, and understand something about their world and environment," Roberts says. He shares that based on his unofficial, initial research, more than 80% of the connections he accepts immediately want to tell him about their product, which he notes is totally missing the point. "Those that do this well know how to build a story, i.e., a connection, before sending over the details of what they are selling," Roberts notes. "It's going to be interesting to see how the bots deal with this. I'd pay for a bot that weeds out all the LinkedIn messages that take the 'Hey buddy, I'd like to sell you something' approach."

## Don't forget about quality

Thus, quality should always be paramount for email marketers. Email is one of the most useful tools for productivity, but most people seem to have a strong dislike towards promotional emails filling up their inboxes, says **Shao Ying**, head of marketing, Greater China, Adobe. "The problem isn't so much about what marketers are doing – generating leads and developing customers – rather the way they go about it," Ying says.

Email is often a company's most effective digital marketing channel, but email marketing campaigns have stayed the same. Ying observes: "Many brands are simply not trying anything new. With so much noise in our inboxes, marketers need to reinvent their email marketing strategy to fit the wants and needs of the connected consumers." With the evolution of the digital marketing area, email marketing will also need a lot more reinvention and adoption of new technologies to provide personalised experiences with more accurate targeting/segmentation strategies, according to Ying.

"Emails will still be a formal and effective way to communicate with your customers. Today's email marketing strategies must encompass some new ideas if marketers wish to be successful," Ying notes. "Today's email-marketing campaigns must be responsive to the demands of new, digitally sophisticated users who will no longer tolerate batch emails addressed to them by name as the only form of personalisation."

Ying says today's email readers want truly personalised and contextually relevant interactions with the businesses they embrace. "Meaningful personalisation that will engage your customers can only be developed if you have a complete understanding of how customers and potential customers interact with your brand at every touchpoint and on every channel," Ying points out. For Steimle, the biggest threat to a marketer is not technology, trends, or competition, rather it's low quality content. "People subscribe to your email list because it promises something those subscribers want. They unsubscribe when that promise is broken," he says.



The problem isn't so much about what marketers are doing, rather the way they go about it.