Before You Decide

Email marketing is increasingly recognized as an effective Internet marketing tool. Email communications provide one of the most cost-effective, convenient and reliable ways to stay in touch with your prospects and clients. Correctly executed, email campaigns provide an outstanding marketing tool to help strengthen customer relationships, improve brand awareness, and increase revenue. But in order to effectively take advantage of the opportunity, one must understand that email marketing is a complex process that involves many aspects.

At first glance, email marketing seems easy: you just make a message, and send it off to a group of people. The reality is that there are many factors involved in effective email development and delivery that you may not be aware of - several areas to consider before deciding on a particular vendor or going with an in-house solution.

This paper highlights areas of email marketing that you may not be aware of, and discuss why organizations must carefully consider how they perform these operations.

Consider these factors before you launch a campaign:

Where Did It Go?

Why deliverability is a growing concern and how you can overcome it.

Why you need to consider SPAM, and how to deal with it.

How Big are Your Pipes?

As your email list grows, can you deal with the technical requirements and bandwidth needed?

The Data Change Game

Managing all of those names, opt-outs, email address changes… do you have the time and technology?

You Need to Make It Before You Send It

Developing message content, making each email and customizing parts.

What about text only versions?

What about a great design?

The Busyness Factor

Can you deal with and stay on top of all the requirements and changes in the market environment?
Do you have the time and personnel?

So What?

How will you know what your emails are doing for you?
Can you measure them the right way?

Where Did It Go?

Deliverability of email is a growing concern on a daily basis. Major ISPs are blocking anywhere from 15% to over 50% of their incoming mail. Assurance Systems, a digital marketing services firm, estimates that about 20% of legitimate, permission-based email is getting blocked as a result of increased spam monitoring.

If you have a deliverability problem, as most go-it-alone email marketers do, your emails will either never get delivered, or you'll be faced with threatening spam "blacklists" and blocks. Many organizations have even had their ISPs shut them down.

The rules are changing daily. The ways to "play nicely" and navigate through spam woes are time intensive, continual, and costly.

Additionally, national and international email regulations have created specific guidelines for sending email messages

Just a few methods for ensuring deliverability:

Create relationships with ISPs and verify that you are a legitimate marketer.	Create a partnership with an anti-spam program like the "Bonded Sender" program.	Make sure your mailing list is continually cleaned;	Work with an organization to monitor your mail delivery.
You'll usually have to sign contracts, follow certain rules and procedures, and stay on top of them as the landscape changes. After the dozen-or-so major ISPs, there are literally thousands of mid-tier ISPs.	You'll have to put up a cash bond and be willing to forfeit the money if you are reported as spam. In return, you'll get "whitelisted" by over 9,000 ISPs. (www.bondedsender.com)	people who unsubscribed are removed, bounced names are managed, and that you are not offending anyone who did not give you permission to mail them. This could also lead to lawsuits resulting from anti-spam laws.	Companies offer services for message delivery statistics, blacklist reporting and spam "rankings" for messages. Services like these deliver sophisticated and useful tools, but they come with a price.
Bottom line: TIME.	**Bottom line: $$$$**	**Bottom line: TIME AND POTENTIAL LAWSUITS**	**Bottom line: $$$$**

How Big are Your Pipes?

Email campaigns can place significant technical "loads" on your network. If you send a message to a few thousand names, depending upon your mail server, you'll eat up a fair amount of your organization's bandwidth. As your list grows, this will become more and more of a burden.

What about all of the bandwidth that everyone often forgets about?

Each HTML message you send out…

Eats up bandwidth when you're sending the message. Sending out the initial message takes a huge amount of resources from your server as well as your network. A slow server or low bandwidth could mean messages take hours or even days to deliver

Eats up bandwidth as people view the message. Images are not embedded in HTML documents, therefore images need to be placed on a public Web server and be accessible for people to view. If they're not, your email message will have plenty of those beautiful red "Xs."

Eats up bandwidth from email "bounces." What happens when you send a message, and someone on your list has an "out of office" auto-reply, or a mailbox is temporarily full? These are called "soft bounces" and your email servers need to accept these emails and do something with them. The same goes for "hard bounces", which are names that are no longer valid.

Eats up bandwidth when you are tracking the message. For every tracking element you are gathering, (see "So What") the message must touch the server to record that data - that equates to bandwidth.

The Data Change Game

Sure, sending an email message to a few colleagues is pretty easy. When you start to market using email however, **things change**. For instance, if you are providing permission-based messages to clients and prospects, you absolutely need to give them the ability to have their name removed, or "unsubscribe." This is the law, and if you don't, you are breaking anti-spam laws.

How will you handle removing these names from your next mailing? Wait until your list gets to be a few thousand names… you'll be sure to get dozens or even hundreds of people unsubscribing each time you send a message. Will you have an easy process of "flagging" them?

People change email addresses. How will you handle address changes? Can you enable people to modify their address without your intervention, or will you have to manually edit names as they notify you? One of the biggest misconceptions about email marketing has to do with the time spent on list management.

Some email marketing services have spent countless hours and lots of money to develop technology and processes to help you easily manage lists of hundreds or even hundreds of thousands of names. Features like auto-removal of unsubscribes, and making sure they stay removed (even warning you if you try to reinstate them as subscriber) are very difficult and costly to develop if you are "going-it alone."

Some of the questions you need to consider in the "Data Change Game."

- How will I import my names and email addresses?
- Will I be able to segment or organize names?
- How will I manage people unsubscribing?
- Will I be able to synchronize my list data into other areas of my organization?
- How will I handle email address changes?
- What if I have the same address twice? Will they get a message twice?

The Busyness Factor

Employing e-marketing strategies specially email marketing requires one to stay on top of the trends and changes in the market environment, marketing challenges as well as various technological issues.

A few essential requirements for effective campaigns…

- Keep up to date and reduce risk associated with changing regulations
- Trouble-shoot ISP relationships and issues, if necessary
- Direct marketing expertise to manage all campaign and marketing data

Bottom line: $$$$, TIME and PERSONAL

You Need to Make It Before You Send It

Developing HTML emails is pretty simple, on the surface. You just create an HTML page, fit it into email dimensions, and you're ready to go. Not exactly.

Successful email marketers need to consider many aspects of email message creation

What if the recipient can't receive HTML messages? Many email clients cannot accept HTML messages. Many people have the HTML option turned off. Some organizations only let text messages through their firewalls. If you "go-it alone," you'll have to consider how you will deliver a text message.

You won't easily be able to know who can receive what. Sophisticated email services have technology that can determine the email client, and deliver the message in a correct format, or the best format to fit their technology parameters. Some services will even create text and other versions (AOL) automatically for you.

Why do people complain that my messages look weird in AOL? Similar to the "text version" dilemma, AOL treats HTML differently than most browsers.

You need to consider how you'll handle this if you "go it alone." Smart technology will automatically create a different version of the message optimized for AOL clients.

Do my messages accurately reflect my brand? Email messages are important to your brand. Think of an email message as an electronic brochure - the design and level of professionalism will be a direct reflection of your brand. Do you have the design and technical talent to create stunning messages - every time?

What's next? As email technology evolves, will you be able to stay ahead of the curve? Email messages are starting to incorporate animation, video and other rich media to further enhance the user experience. How will you incorporate new technology into your messages?

So What?

Once you send an email message (and assuming it actually gets delivered), do you know what happened to it? One of the most powerful aspects of permission-based email marketing is the ability to instantly track many aspects of the message.

Measuring the success of your message is commonly overlooked, yet it is crucial to email marketing.

Consider gathering and analyzing the following data if you decide to launch campaigns:

- Will you be able to view…
- Who opened your email messages?
- How many times people opened it?
- What people clicked on?
- How many times people clicked?
- If people forwarded the message to anyone?
- If people unsubscribed?
- If people changed their email address?
- If people are no longer at an email address?

Will you be able to…

- Compare the success of one message to another?
- Combine messages to understand success of a series of messages?
- View trends in your list growth and mail volume?
- View trends in your mail volume?

Reporting is an extremely valuable part of email marketing. Having the opportunity to see exactly what happened to a message gives you the ability to make better decisions on future messages and offers. Email reporting is also "real-time," providing data minutes after you send a message. Will you have a complete suite of reporting tools if you "go-it alone?"

Conclusions

Whether or not you decide to "go it alone" or work with an email marketing service (like Hilltop-Mail), the areas of email delivery, list management, message creation and reporting should be of significant concern to you.
Many times, marketers only look at costs for execution and consider inside costs as "nothing." This is certainly contrary to actual fact, considering all the areas we've just mentioned.

We wish you great email success with your campaigns.

Additional Questions?

All of the issues and features addressed in this white paper are considered in the Hilltop-Mail product offering, enabling clients to develop and deliver email success.

If you have additional questions, we'd be happy to discuss them with you.

About Hilltop-Mail

Hilltop-Mail is partnered with a leading provider of email marketing tools and services. Its patent-pending solution enables organizations to send permission-based email newsletters and campaigns through an easy to-use, cost-effective, and sophisticated Web-based system. For further information, go to www.hilltop-mail.com

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