Article Side

The Quandary of Email Content Type: Direct Response Email Vs. Informational Email

by Brice Galen

Article published on May 14th 2012 | Email Marketing

If you're considering implementing an email marketing program, of if you've already started emailing but aren't sure if your email content is the right type of content, this article explores whether an informational newsletter or a direct response sales email will be better for your overall email needs.

Finding the Right Balance Between Email Content Types

Often, in developing your email program, the following question will arise: "Will my customers be offended and stop reading my emails if every email is just a hard sell?" Shortly after that question arises, the next logical question comes to mind. "But if I send only informational content in an email, will my users then follow through to purchase anything or will they just read the email and then delete it?"

Finding the right email content type between providing users with email content that will make them feel that your email marketing is valuable and generating direct sales and ROI from your email campaign can be a challenge. Succeeding at accomplishing the best balance will most likely requires testing on your part. However, there are some basic concepts that you can walk through while developing your email program.

What exactly did your users sign up for? What do your users want?

The first question that you need to ask yourself when deciding which type of email content to choose is "What exactly content did you promise your users when they signed up for your newsletter?" Does your newsletter sign-up box promise users a weekly tip? Does it promise informational articles? Do users sign-up because you've assured them that there are exclusive monthly discounts to members of the email list? The most basic rule of thumb is that your email recipients need to receive exactly what it is that you promised them. So if you've incentivized people into signing up for your email list by promising them quarterly white papers or ebooks, then that needs to be what you send if you want to keep your list loyal.

The second half to this question, however, is the more important one. What is it, exactly, that your users want to receive in their emails? And how do you determine this?

There are two ways to figure out what email content your users really want to receive. The first, creating multiple email list options, is detailed below. The second, however, is to do some simpleemail testing such as a/b tests. In this instance, you'll need to change your email acquisition page (whether that's a separate landing page or a module on your main website) to present a different value proposition for your email product at different times. The easiest way to do this is to change it out at the beginning of a week. So, for example:

- During the first week, when people sign up for your email list, they see the message "Join our email list for weekly tips on becoming a happier person."

- During the second week, when people sign up for your email list, they see the message "Join our email list for exclusive monthly product discounts."

At the end of each week, divide the number of impressions that the pages with the email capture form received by the number of sign-ups to the email list in order to get your conversion percentage.

The one that performed better is the one that your clients want to receive!

Create Multiple Email Formats to Get the Best of Everybody

An even better option than trying to limit your email list to just one format that appeals to only one segment of your audience is to create different email lists for your users to join. Typically, this would include an informational newsletter, a discount or special offer email and a generic update email list. However, depending on your product or business, there are many other options as well. You may have enough users to create email options that are specific to brands, geographies, and types of news or other segments.

The benefit of offering multiple email lists for your users to choose from is that you'll always be sure that your users are receiving exactly what they wanted. The downside, however, is that you'll be producing more email products and your email list management will become harder, track and determine ROI on. The scope of your resources and the importance of email marketing in your marketing mix should be the driver on this decision making.

Also, remember that even if you offer multiple email lists to your clients, CAN-SPAM requires that you offer users the option of opting out of all emails instead of just one list!

What if my users want informational emails? Can my email program be profitable then?

One of the more common issues we've encountered in the email marketing world is the dilemma of what happens when your users don't actively want to be marketed to but instead want to receive informational emails. While discounts, sales and exclusive merchandise tend to be the primary reasons that people will join an email list, you will find the situation where people honestly prefer information based emails. In this case, we'd suggest that you keep in mind two factors when evaluating the value of your email program.

Retention Value: In an earlier article, we discussed customer life cycle and how email can be used to extend the time a customer is in a relationship with your brand. While a direct return on an email is important, there's also value in the fact that your email keeps your brand and product name in the mind of your users even when they're not ready to make a subsequent purchase from you. Because your email program develops a relationship with your clients, when they are ready to make a purchase again, you'll be the first option in their mind. Be sure to factor the retention value of your email when evaluating its role in your marketing mix.

Contextual Selling: Also, let it not be thought that it is impossible to generate sales out of an information email. It's just that doing that means that you need to take the time and effort to create very compelling email content. Contextually mentioning products and linking to those products from your email, when done well, can actually yield better results than a direct sales email in some instances. The key is to relate the product to the information in such a way that users really see how the product is useful to them and then act on that information. Contextual marketing is an entire lesson on its own. However, don't underestimate the value that can come from it!

Is it really terrible to send a direct response email to a list that's opted-in to a newsletter or informational email?

The short answer is that it's not terrible at all! Often your users will appreciate your periodic discount or sales email and respond favorably (and profitably) to it. The key is to limit how many times you send these types of emails and to make sure that the offers that you include in them will truly be perceived as valuable by your clients or users. If you're sending direct solicitation offers as frequently as informational newsletters, then that's too often! But sending a special offer monthly will most likely be appreciated by your users.

There's no hard and fast answer to which email content type your clients want to receive. You'll need to experiment, listen to your customers and pay attention to what gets the best responses

when you send it out. However, most companies will find that walking the line between useful email content and compelling offers will yield the best results.

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Brice Galen - About Author:
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Article Keywords:
email content type,Email Marketing

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